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❂►FOREWORD◄❂

Sandstorm

The Untold Stories

She Dared to Dance with Fire

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DISCLAIMER

This book is largely based on @lunar-serenity's "Firestar." and will follow along with some of its plot lines. It is recommended that you read that story before beginning this one.

I also do not own any of the characters in this book. They are the property of Erin Hunter, author of the Warrior Cats saga.

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Please note that these stories are *head-canons*, which means that they follow along the basic plot line, but may or may not have actually happened. There will also be MAJOR SPOILERS within the chapters, so please proceeding at your own risk.

This book will be split into four sections. The Beginning: Before the Fire (time before Firestar), The Untold: Vitrification (most of her life) which will be the longest part, The End: Shards (Journey with Alderheart), and The After: Infinity (Starclan).

This book will be written in the first person, as if Sandstorm were reminiscing on her past.

I plan to make this book more aestheticized than my previous stories. Please let me know if you enjoy the new look.

These chapters will most likely be somewhere between 1-3,000 words, and will be more professionally written, so expect some

delays. I promise I'll try to write as much as I can.

Also, please tell me how I did on the cover. This was my first time making my own cover as opposed to having someone do it for me.

❂----------❂

I hope you enjoy my attempt at a character-summary-story book.Please give as many suggestions as possible. I plan to continue this series with other cats as well, so you can show me that you wish for that to happen by reading this book.

Thank you

✧

- Maple -

- 3 ▫ 7 ▫ 2024 -

❂►THE EARLY ⥢⊢⥤ BEFORE THE FIRE◄❂

❂ *This chapter exists purely for the purpose of aesthetics* ❂

✧ O N E ✧

❂► THE BEGINNING ◄❂

BEFORE THE FIRE

✧

ONE

❂----------❂

THE FIRST noises I ever heard were lots of concerned mews, as well as a lot of scuttling around. I was still too young to understand what every one was saying, as my brain hadn't developed enough to process information, much less open my eyes to see what was going on. The abundance of noises, as well as the cold, annoyed me as a kit, so like all kits, I started to cry.

I remember the feel of my mother's thin tail wrapping around me, and being softly dragged across the moss of her nest towards her stomach. Thankfully it was warmer there, and I was able to feed myself as well. A voice that I could only assume to be my mother spoke, and uttered some noises that seemed to stop everyone else and force them to focus on her. My cries died out, and the rest my surroundings also quieted down, the frantic voices I heard faintly growing further distant.

Now, instead of the rapid mews, I heard only the soft spoken words of my mother, again incoherent as I couldn't understand anything. I would assume she had been saying things to comfort me into a sleep, which worked very quickly after I was done feeding.

I didn't open my eyes until a few sunrises later, which was just a little after I had begun to understand the sounds coming from different cat's mouths. I hadn't been able to repeat much of anything back to them other than noises, but I did know "hungry" and "thirsty". They were basic necessities so it made sense that I

knew them first.

"Redtail, come quick! She's opened her eyes!" A small, bushy tortoiseshell tom burst in through the entrance to the den.

Redtail. My father.

Redtail bent his head closer to mine. I stared up into his deep amber eyes, his nose so close to mine that his whiskers were tickling my face. In response to the tickling, I sneezed. Redtail let out a hearty chuckle. "Her eyes are just like yours, Brindleface. Absolutely beautiful."

Brindleface. My mother.

"Our little Sandkit," Brindleface cooed.

Sandkit. Me.

✧✧✧

A moon or so after I opened my eyes, and was able to hold conversation, I was approached by Spottedleaf. Well, "I" being Brindleface and I.

Brindleface smiled as she saw the medicine cat approach us. Spottedleaf bent down, placed a paw on my hind leg, and asked me quietly, "Sandkit, can you push your leg against my paw, as hard you can?" I mustered up all of my strength and pushed against her paw, but didn't move my body. Spottedleaf encouraged me when I finally said, "I can't anymore."

Spottedleaf nodded, but then acted as if I hadn't complained and spoke directly to my mother. "I'm unfortunately the bearer of bad news, Brindleface."

My mother, who had not been paying attention to what Spottedleaf or I were doing, and had maintained casual conversation, contorted

her face in fear. "Why? What happened? Did something happen to Redtail? Is he okay?"

"No," Spottedleaf said, shaking her head slightly. "Nothing of the sort. It's actually bad news about Sandkit."

Brindleface's tail curled protectively around me after hearing those words. "Are they really that weak?"

I had no idea what either of them were talking about. As far as I was concerned, I was completely fine and was going to be a strong, healthy kit. Spottedleaf was just playing a game with me. That proved to not be the case, however.

Apparently my legs were so underdeveloped that it was almost impossible for me to just stand up, much less walk around camp or play with the other kits.

Spottedleaf solemnly nodded in response to Brindleface's question. "Yes, her legs are that weak. She won't be able to stand properly without assistance if she doesn't do physical therapy. And that could take moons."

Brindleface was shocked, to say the least. "Moons?! How is she supposed to grow up like a normal kit if she's stuck doing physical therapy?"

"That we'll have to find out," Spottedleaf replied. "I also have no knowledge in the field of physical therapy. Mudfur of Riverclan does, though, and he's willing to come to Thunderclan to help out Sandkit, on the premise that I go to Riverclan to be their medicine cat in his absence. I've already spoken with Bluestar, and she's agreed to the plan."

Brindleface nodded in response and looked down at me. She asked me reluctantly, "What do you think, Sandkit?" I wasn't completely sure what physical therapy meant, so I just nodded my head along to what they were saying. "Well, seems as though she's on board."

"Alright. I'll talk more with Bluestar and then come back here to set everything up with you," Spottedleaf finished as she exited the

nursery.

The next four moons consisted of waking up every morning to be greeted by Mudfur. Every day we'd start with trying to stand up and balance myself. Even just that took an agonizing four sunrises. Once I was able to stand, we tried slowly walking around the den, either Mudfur or Brindleface on one of my shoulders to catch me in case I fell. Which shockingly happened a lot.

"Oomph."

"That's alright Sandkit, just get up and try again. No shame in falling," Mudfur said.

Yeah, except for the whole falling in front of everybody part, I had thought.

This daily process continued until I was finally able to graduate into walking around the camp with little support. Finally being able to explore the camp at the ripe age of three moons was bitter-sweet. On one hand, exploring all the various dens and meeting warriors for the first time was fascinating, but Dustkit and Ravenkit, who I shared the nursery with, had met all of these cats and explored all of these dens nearly three moons ago.

The worst part of all of these physical therapy sessions came at the end of each session, when Mudfur would have me get into various positions and have me stretch as far as I could. If he didn't think I was stretching far enough, he would grab my hind-legs or front paws or whatever I was stretching and pull on them himself. This always hurt a lot, and he wouldn't stop even asked him to multiple times.

"Can you stretch any further, Sandkit?" Mudfur asked. This day he had me on my back with my front paws on one side of me and my hind paws on the other, so that my back was twisted.

"No," I said, "This is as far as I can go." Mudfur let out a noise that sounded like a sigh mixed with a scoff, and walked over to me. My eyes widened as I realized what he was going to do, and I pleaded with him. "Mudfur, no! It always hurts when you stretch me!"

"If it doesn't hurt, you aren't doing it right," he grumbled. Mudfur put one forepaw on my left shoulder, and the other on my right hind leg, and pushed them in opposite directions. In response, I yowled in pain. My spine felt as though it would snap without Mudfur stretching me, but with the extra torque it felt even tighter. "Just a little more," he said, "And then we're done for the day."

Mudfur pushed even harder against my body until suddenly there was a loud pop. "Ahhhh," I sighed. That was the first time my back had ever popped, and it relieved a lot of the pain. "What was that?" I asked Mudfur.

"That was what we were aiming for all this time with stretching," he explained, "Popping the bubbles in your back relieves a lot of pain, and should allow you to move more freely. How does it feel?"

"Awesome!" I said, standing up quickly, "I feel like I could jog around the camp all by myself!"

"Want to try?" Mudfur asked.

I was able to run around that day, which ended up being one of the last times I did physical therapy with Mudfur. He eventually just gave me a few things to do every day, some of which I still do to this day in Starclan. I even do some of the stretching with Firestar's assistance. He's a lot gentler than Mudfur.

On the last day of physical therapy with Mudfur, I was formally introduced to the other kits in the den, Greykit, Dustkit, and Ravenkit. Dustkit and Ravenkit's mother was Robinwing, who also happened to be Brindleface's mother.

I don't know how I never put two and two together, but I am just now realizing that Dustpelt was my kin all along. And I was going to be mates with him. Yuck.

Greykit was a moon or so younger than me, so he wasn't really close with us until right before we became apprentices. Dustkit and I hit it off right away, but it took a few playtimes for Ravenkit to be completely comfortable around me. I still remember the first time he willingly joined us in a game.

Dustkit and I were playing mossball together, and may or may not have gotten into a few warrior's way and were scolded. But we were kits, so at the end of the day, it was expected.

"Sandkit, watch this!" Dustkit exclaimed. I turned away from looking at the medicine cat den, where I could see Spottedleaf's outline sorting herbs, although at the time I didn't know what she was doing.

Dustkit had the mossball in his mouth, and his tail swishing back and forth. When he saw me look at him, he smiled through the ball in his mouth and said again, "Watch!" Dustkit threw the ball up in the air with his paw, landed, spun around twice, and then jumped and caught it.

"Wow!" I exclaimed,"That was awesome! Can I try?"

"Sure! You throw, spin twice, and then jump and catch, okay?"

"Okay," I said. I attempted the trick that Dustkit had performed, but after I spun around twice, I saw the mossball land on the ground next to me. "Aw, Fox-dung."

"It's alright, it was a good try," he reassured. "You just have to throw the ball a little higher, like this." Dustkit then proceeded to throw the ball at least a fox length higher than I did. "See?"

"I don't think I'm strong enough to throw it that high, Dustkit. But I'll try!" Again I was unsuccessful, albeit by less of a margin. This time, when I finished spinning, I felt the mossball whiz right by my head. "Dang it!"

"Maybe you'll get it when you're a little bit older. Plus, you had to do that therapy thingy with the Riverclan cat for awhile, and didn't get as used to throwing the mossball as I did." I nodded in agreement with the dusty kit. He had a good point, I was just naturally weaker because of my birth defect.

"Could I try?" I heard a voice beside me ask. Dustkit and I both whipped our heads towards the sound, to see Ravenkit timidly standing a few taillengths away from us, closer to the edge of the

clearing.

Dustpelt and I gave each other a quick, surprised look, and shrugged simultaneously. "Sure, give it a shot," Dustpelt finally said, passing the mossball to Ravenkit.

Ravenkit was able to get a lot closer to what Dustkit did than what I did. When he finished spinning around twice, the ball was still an okay distance up in the air. But when he leaped for the mossball, he undershot it and ended up snapping his jaws shut just a little bit short of the ball. It plopped down sadly behind him.

"That was really close, Ravenkit!" I praised. The tom still looked down though.

"Yeah, but I still didn't catch it."

"So?" Dustkit reasoned, "That doesn't mean anything. If you were this close this time, imagine what the result will be next time now that you know how high you have to jump! And even if you don't get it then, maybe the next time! It won't be long for you now, just think about Sandkit! She'll still have to wait awhile before she can throw it up high enough to catch it after she spins."

While I was glad that Ravenkit seemed a lot happier after Dustkit's explanation, I did still give Dustkit a death glare after what he said about me. Sure, what he said was true, but he didn't have to rub it in.

Unfortunately, that was the first and last time I ever saw Dustkit do that trick. After he had performed it a few more times with Ravenkit—who got it on his third try—a tall figure loomed over us, causing Dustkit to drop the ball.

"Kits should stay by the nursery," he said, tossing the dropped mossball closer to the nursery.

Tigerclaw. Never liked the guy.

We dragged ourselves over there, quietly grumbling to each other about Tigerclaw and how he was being unfair. "Warriors," Dustkit scoffed, "They always think that they know everything."

"To be fair, they know a lot more than us," Ravenkit added. That earned an eye-roll from Dustkit.

I miss those days, where it was just the three of us against the world. Before Ravenpaw went off to live with Barley and when Dustpelt hadn't been mentored by Tigerclaw. Would it have been better if Greystripe were our age, or if Firestar were clanborn? Maybe, but I wouldn't give up that time for anything. Even the stretching with Mudfur.

I should go find Ravenpaw and Dustpelt and ask them to do the trick again. They could show Firestar, and maybe even my kits. I think that might be fun.

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Word count - 2262

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Author's Note

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I am so unbelievably excited to write this book.

I'm having more fun choosing the designs for the titles and spacers and everything than I had creating all of the cats for The Five Giants. Giving every symbol meaning, especially the suns as endpoints, meant to represent the desert sun, is so much fun. And the star spacers in the title are meant to represent Sandstorm finding her way to Firestar, while the star spacers in the book represent the three closest cats to Sandstorm: Firestar, Leafpool, and Squirrelflight. So much fun.

I want to play a little game. You all have seen the names of all of the sections in the foreword. The first person to correctly guess what all four of them mean will earn the opportunity to choose one for the story lines for this book. I will DM you details.

If this box is filled, the meanings have been guessed correctly ⊡

I hope I can get another chapter out soon, and it'd be awesome if it's as quickly as I got this one out.

Thank you again for your support on this story.

✧

- Maple -

- 3 ▫ 9 ▫ 2024 -

✧ T W O ✧

✧

T W O

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BECAUSE OF what happened with my legs, I was made an apprentice a few days after Dustpelt and Ravenpaw were. Brindleface still wanted me to have as much of a normal kithood as I could, so she requested with Bluestar that my ceremony be delayed by a moon. Greystripe was made an apprentice alongside me, as Bluestar wanted to expedite the additions of new warriors. Between the tension with Riverclan over Sunningrocks and the ever-looming presence of Shadowclan on our borders, Bluestar was convinced that our only chance to stay on top was to train more and more warriors. Which made sense.

Dustpaw was apprenticed under my father, Redtail. Bluestar must have seen something in him to be willing to apprentice him under the deputy.

Ravenpaw was apprenticed under Tigerclaw, and to this day I can't see why she would allow Tigerclaw to mentor him. Ravenpaw was too nervous of a cat to handle the rough training style that Tigerclaw had. Although I couldn't really imagine anyone else training under him. *Maybe* Dustpaw, but he might have turned out a different cat if that happened. And I don't know if I could have ever been friends with him then.

The best pairing had to be Greypaw with Lionheart. Greypaw was incredibly extroverted and jumpy, and Lionheart was the exact opposite. Honestly, I don't think any other cat would have the

patience to deal with him for the next four moons.

Yes, four, if you could recall, Greystripe and Firestar were made warriors before Dustpelt and I. It's still a sensitive topic. I make Firestar sleep in his own nest when he brings it up.

"Sandkit, you have long passed the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Sandpaw." Bluestar didn't even have to look around, or weigh her options. "Whitestorm. You have proven to be an incredibly patient and skillful cat, and are ready to have your first apprentice. I expect you to pass down all you know to Sandpaw."

Whitestorm dipped his head in understanding and padded towards me from the inner circle of the crowd. He bent down to touch his nose to mine. "Don't worry," he whispered, "I'm just as nervous as you are." If he was nervous, he was great at not showing it. It was pretty easy to tell that I was nervous from my fluffed fur to my quivering tail.

I think pairing me with Whitestorm was also a good idea. Whitestorm was calm enough to keep me under control. Even I'm aware that I have a pretty quick temper. Firestar points that out sometimes. That also earns him a night in his own nest.

"Sandpaw! Greypaw! Sandpaw! Greypaw!" The clan cheered. After Bluestar dismissed the crowd, I was swarmed by a flurry of congratulating cats. The amount of "thanks" that left my mouth probably outnumbered the amount of stars in Starpelt.

When the crowd finally broke from around me, I saw Brindleface and Redtail heading in my direction. Once they reached me, Brindleface circled around me while Redtail stopped in front of me and touched his forehead to mine.

"We're both so proud of you Sandpaw," Brindleface said. Redtail purred in agreement.

"Why?" I said, slightly laughing, "I haven't even done anything yet!"

My parents both laughed. "We're proud of you for not being a mouse-brain and doing something that would make Bluestar mad," Redtail said.

"And overcoming the difficulty with your legs," Brindleface added.

"And that," my father agreed.

Brindleface explained, "No one else in the clan knows the pain and struggles you went through."

"No one has had to go through what you went through. You've overcome something that should've rendered you immobile," Redtail continued.

I appreciated my parents both acknowledging what I had accomplished, but I didn't feel as though it was necessary to come up to me and congratulate me excessively. Even if I did spend four moons training with Mudfur to strengthen my leg.

"Save it for my warrior ceremony," I said, "Then I'll *really* deserve the congratulations."

The rest of that day was just resting and moving into the apprentice's den, which was empty before Dustpaw and Ravenpaw moved in. The two of them had been out on their first patrols all day, so they hadn't done the traditional thing of making the new apprentice's nest for them.

I settled my nest next to Dustpaw, as we had grown especially close, and Greypaw settled his closer to Ravenpaw's nest and the wall. I immediately settled down, as we had quite the big day coming up.

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I was dead tired by the time we had reached the Shadowclan border. Even with the extra few days that Bluestar had given me to be a kit, I didn't have enough play time to develop the stamina to

make the trek around the territory.

"This is the border we share with Shadowclan," Whitestorm said, "Learn their scent well."

"Shadowclan cats are feared across the clans for their ferocity and fearlessness," Lionheart continued, "During your training, you will learn how to defeat them in battle using your wits."

"What about when we fight Windclan?" Greypaw asked.

"Windclan cats are the fastest of all cats. You will use your strength to overpower them."

"And what about Riverclan?"

"There will come a time when you will know every possible move to defeat any cat, no matter the clan they come from, young Greypaw, but for now, all that you need to worry about is learning the territory," Whitestorm finished.

"Do we *have* to fight other cats?" I asked once I had caught my breath.

"All leaders wish to stay out of fights as much as possible, unless absolutely necessary. But sometimes, insulted cats that are blinded by pride start fights that result in unnecessary deaths," a voice from beside me explained.

I turned my head and saw Bluestar standing next to me. All four of us instinctively bowed our heads in respect.

Throughout my years, I quickly learned that Bluestar's statement couldn't be more true. Warriors just in simple border patrols would start bloody fights just because a single piece of prey was caught a tail-length over their border.

"Bluestar! What's the occasion?" Whitestorm asked.

"I was curious how Thunderclan's two newest apprentices were coming along. Plus, I needed to get on my paws, and thought that I might as well join you," she explained.

"Then we welcome you to our patrol," Lionheart said. Talking to Greypaw and I, he continued, "Come along now. Next we will head towards the Twoleg dens and the Tallpines."

I was not looking forward to this trek, because although it was much shorter, all of the energy I had in my paws was taken by the walk to the Shadowclan border. Luckily, Whitestorm seemed to have noticed that I had been lagging behind. "Lionheart, Sandpaw is getting tired. I'm going to take her along the Riverclan border, and then straight back to camp to rest."

Lionheart nodded in response, and beckoned Greypaw with his tail. Whitestorm turned in the other direction, and I hurriedly followed after him. "Thanks," I said.

"Don't worry about it," he replied, "This isn't supposed to tire you out, it's supposed to be fun and new. I can take you along the Twolegplace some other day. We only patrol there to make sure no kittypets are causing trouble, and there generally isn't much prey."

The walk along the Riverclan border consisted of seeing Sunningrocks and then laying there, basking in the sun's rays with Whitestorm. It was an amazing end to an exciting day.

Little did I know about how horrible of a day the next day would be.

Little did I know about how incredible of a day the next day would be.

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Word Count - 1301

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Author's Note

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Just for context, when Whitestorm and Sandpaw separated from the others, that's when Greypaw, Lionheart, and Bluestar ran into

Firestar, at that time Rusty.

And the two last sentences were not me forgetting to delete a sentence, that was on purpose.

This chapter is the end of "The Beginning"! Next we will move onto the main section of the series, "The Untold". I'm planning on making this section fifteen or so parts. At least twelve.

Like I said in my announcement, I'm setting a tentative schedule of a chapter every week. Lacrosse is starting, so I don't know if that's gonna last, but we'll see.

Also please go to the first chapter and guess what each section name means. I'm begging you for new ideas.

✧

- Maple -

- 3 ▫ 13 ▫ 2024 -

❂►THE UNTOLD ⥢⊢⥤ VITRIFICATION◄❂

✪ *This chapter exists purely for the purpose of aesthetics* ✪

✧ O N E ✧

❂► T H E U N T O L D ◄❂

V I T R I F I C A T I O N

✧

O N E

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THE DAY that Firestar joined the clan was both one of the worst days of my life, and one of the best days of my life.

Of course, I didn't think it was one of the best on that day, but as I got older I started to appreciate it more.

I'll be honest, the way I acted towards Firestar when he was new to the clan wasn't completely fair. I didn't have any resentment towards kittypets, like Tigerclaw did, but with everything that went on that day, I wasn't in the best of moods for moons.

"Bluestar!" I heard Runningwind call after bursting into the clearing. Runningwind continued sprinting through the clearing, almost slamming into Bluestar as she exited her den.

"Starclan above, what, Runningwind!" Bluestar asked, clearly surprised that Runningwind was so frantic.

Runningwind tried to catch his breath before saying, "Riverclan is at Sunningrocks! I was just going to hunt around the edges of the territory when I saw Riverclan cats splayed out on the highest stones, basking in the sun!"

"Those Fox-hearts!" Tigerclaw seethed as he approached the conversing cats. "Bluestar, let me take a patrol and we'll make sure they never take another step on rightful Thunderclan territory."

"I appreciate your ambition, Tigerclaw, but we must make sure that this isn't a misunderstanding. Redtail!" The leader called to my father, who was sharing tongues with Brindleface. "I want you to lead a patrol to go see what's going on at Sunningrocks. Take Tigerclaw, Mousefur, Runningwind, and Ravenpaw. But please try to avoid as much bloodshed as possible. We can't afford to lose anymore warriors."

Redtail nodded and quickly searched the clearing, making eye contact with Mousefur and Ravenpaw, who had both just left their respective dens. Once Redtail had everyone gathered, he looked to Bluestar. "We'll be back soon," he said, and then turning to the light brow tabby, said, "Runningwind, lead the way." With that, the group of five hurriedly exited the camp.

I shrugged my shoulders and dug back into my mouse. I assumed that Redtail would be back with the others before Sundown. Then he, Brindleface and I could share a meal before we retired to our nests.

Oh, how little I knew.

I licked my lips after I finished my mouse, and picked up the leftover bones in my jaws, heading towards a shady edge of the clearing to deposit the bones. Then I realized that I would have to deposit of these bones somewhere in the forest later anyways, so I groaned to myself and change direction to the entrance of the clearing.

I pushed through the loose bramble that covered the outside of the entrance, and looked at my surroundings. It took me a surprisingly large amount of time to find a large patch of bushes, in which I buried the bones under the ground between two of the smaller bushes.

It was when I entered back into the camp that I noticed him. He was in between Lionheart and Whitestorm, and they were taking him around the camp. Then Bluestar padded up to him and greeted him.

I was kind of just frozen in place, trying to figure out what was

going on. His pelt was incredibly bright, like my own but more vibrant. But it wasn't like any cats in this clan, much less any of the cats in the other clans that I knew of.

And that collar. That *stupid* collar around his neck with the bell. He trotted around the camp with that *stupid* collar making its *stupid* noise.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highrock for a clan meeting!" Bluestar called.

Ah, there it is. Now I could figure out who this cat was.

"Thunderclan needs more warriors," she began. "never before have we had so few apprentices in training. It has been decided that Thunderclan will take in an outsider to train as a warrior..."

The rest of the clan erupted in a series of mutterings, but Bluestar silenced them all with a firm yowl. "I have found a cat who is willing to become an apprentice of Thunderclan."

"*Lucky* to become an apprentice," I heard Longtail say. Another chorus of mutterings arose.

Bluestar once again quieted us with a yowl. "Lionheart and Whitestorm have met this young cat, and they agree that we should train him with the other apprentices."

Now a deafening caterwaul of questions arose from the clan, some of which echoed my own thoughts:

"Where does he come from?"

"What clan does he belong to?"

"What a strange scent that is. It's not from any clan *I* know!"

Then Longtail spoke up again. "Look at his collar! He's a kittypet!" So that's what that meant. "Once a kittypet, always a kittypet. This Clan needs wildborn warriors to defend it, not another soft mouth to feed."

I only mildly agreed with what Longtail said. Leafbare was rapidly approaching, and yes, another cat to feed certainly wouldn't be ideal, but if we could train this cat quickly, then he could be useful in finding prey.

I saw Lionheart bend down to say something to the cat as the crowd still spoke of their worries. Longtail was at the bottom of the Highrock, exchanging words with Bluestar. Then he was tackled by the kittypet.

Longtail let out a yowl of surprise as he tumbled over on the ground, taking the kittypet with him. They both sprang back up and stared at each other for a few seconds, until Longtail snarled and leapt at the kittypet. The kittypet dodged Longtail's leap, and raked his tiny claws down the tabby's side.

Longtail turned and snarled, leaping right back at the orange tom. This time, the kittypet was unable to dodge the attack and the fighting cats turned into a mess of teeth and claws.

When they sprang apart, I was surprised to see that the kittypet remained mostly unscathed, while Longtail's ear had a nasty cut. "Enough of this," Longtail said, just loud enough for the clan to hear. He surged forward, twisting his head and opening his jaws.

The clan drew in a silent breath as we all thought the same thing. Longtail was going to kill this kittypet.

Luckily, the kittypet was able to draw back just enough as to where Longtail just missed his throat. Instead, his jaws clamped around that *stupid* collar. The kittypet's eyes widened as he lost the air to his lungs. The two locked into an intense struggle, the kittypet for air and Longtail for the collar apparently.

Instinctively I took a step to help the two, possibly break them up, but Dustpaw's tail whipped out in front of me. "Don't help the kittypet," he hissed. "If he want's to join the clan, he'll figure it out."

I didn't really agree with that, because it's not like he could decide to join the clan if Longtail strangled him.

Then the collar snapped, and Longtail and the kittypet fell backward. They both immediately sprang back up, and faced each other again, both of them trying to catch their breath.

Bluestar let out yet another yowl. "This kittypet has lost his collar in a battle for his honor. Starclan has spoken their approval." The kittypet turned around and kicked dust over his collar, as if burying it.

"Your pelt looks like a brand of fire in the sunlight," Bluestar said. "From this moment on, until you receive your warrior name, you will known as Firepaw. That being said, your sudden acceptance into the clan has not given me enough time to determine the best mentor for you. For now, you will split training with Lionheart and Tigerclaw, as well as their apprentices. In a moon's time, I will assess where you are at and determine a mentor for you."

The clan was silent for a while, no one quite sure what to do, even though they had just gone through multiple apprentice ceremonies in the past moon.

Then finally, one voice spoke up. "Firepaw! Firepaw! Firepaw!" Greypaw cheered.

I couldn't leave my denmate by himself, so I joined in. "Firepaw! Firepaw!" Dustpaw gave me a few disgusted looks, and moved away. I looked after him sadly, but didn't let up in my cheering.

Then, one by one, the clan joined in. "Firepaw! Firepaw! Firepaw!"

The crowd finally broke when Greypaw burst into the center of the clearing to congratulate Firepaw. I took a step towards them, but saw Dustpaw staring at me out of the corner of his eye. I sighed and turned to follow him instead, headed towards the apprentice's den.

I don't know how Dustpelt ever grew a disliking towards kittypets. As Firestar frequently mentioned, the warrior code doesn't tell us to loathe kittypets, but to only reject the life of one. Plus, it's not as though Dustpelt had Tigerclaw, Darkstripe, or Longtail as a mentor. He had my father, who as far as I knew, shared Firestar's view of kittypets.

And I held that same view for most of my life as well. The only time I didn't was when Ravenpaw crashed back into the clearing.

"Smallear smells trouble!" I heard White-eye call.

Ravenpaw burst through the brambles at the entrance of the camp, eyes wide, chest heaving, and legs flailing. He looked like he was trying to say something, but was panting too heavily to get any words out. "R- R- R-."

By this time, the rest of the clan had exited their dens and stood around Ravenpaw in the clearing, wondering what was going on. Finally, Bluestar stepped forward and said, "C'mon, out with it Ravenpaw. What happened? Why are you so anxious?"

"Redtail is dead!" He finally got out.

A wave of deafening silence crashed over the clan, everyone reveling in what was just said. This was followed by a chaotic chorus of questions, everyone demanding an explanation of what happened.

I'm sure that some type of answer was given to the onslaught of words, but I was already lost.

No, Redtail can't be dead! He promised me that he would teach me how to climb! Ravenpaw must have been put up to this. By Tigerclaw! To show how brave he was! Yes, that's it. Redtail will walk through the bramble entrance in just a few moments.

A rustle in the brambles only lifted my spirits, and seeing a flash of red fur lifted them more. But they sank to the depths of rock bottom when Tigerclaw walked through the entrance, carrying the limp body of my father, eyes still open in shock.

I let out a desperate wail, shared by Brindleface, as we both rushed forward, burying our noses into Redtail's fur.

Wake up, Redtail. Please *open your eyes. You have to.*

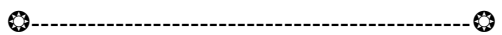
But he didn't, and minutes later I laid next to Bluestar and Brindleface as we shared tongues with Redtail one last time.

I think that that was when I began to loathe Firepaw. It's not like it was his fault that Redtail was dead, but there must have bee some deranged concept in my mind that none of this would have happened if he didn't exist. Maybe then Bluestar, Whitestorm, and Lionheart wouldn't have been occupied with welcoming Firepaw into the clan. Maybe they wouldn't have sent so few cats to go and fight Riverclan. Maybe someone like Lionheart could have joined them, and with his skill, they would have won.

I found out later in life that this obviously wouldn't have done anything, since it wasn't Oakheart that killed Redtail, but that Tigerclaw had actually killed Redtail in his ambitious campaign to become the leader of Thunderclan.

So my hate of Firepaw ended up being misplaced. But that hate still might have been a good thing. If I weren't to have hated him when he first joined, it's possible that I wouldn't have grown to see him the way that I do know. The hate that I had for him when we were apprentices allowed me to learn to love him on a deeper level, on that surpassed basic kit love. Our relationship would have been a lot less trusting, and may have not even lasted as long as it did.

Who knows, maybe I would have ended up with Dustpelt instead of Firestar.



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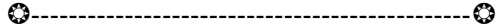

Author's Note

✧

That word count is kinda scary.

So remember that tentative schedule I set last chapter? The one where I was gonna do a chapter every Saturday? Yeah that ended up not happening. It's almost been two months.

However, I just finished school (Here I come college) and Lacrosse

is entering into the playoffs, so I may have some more time to write.

As always, no promises.

Also, please I'm begging you to go back to the Foreword chapter and guess what the chapter names mean. I'm on my knees at this point.

✧

- Maple -

- 5 ▫ 10 ▫ 2024 -

✧ T W O ✧

❂► T H E U N T O L D ◄❂

V I T R I F I C A T I O N

✧

T W O

❂----------❂

DUSTPAW WAS ignoring me the following mornings, no matter how I tried to talk to him. I tried to apologize for supporting Firepaw's acceptance into the clan, which, looking back, was desperate, but he would have none of it.

I tried my best to get him back with my constant poking at Firepaw, whether it be calling him a kittypet or tripping him with my tail. At one point I even tried stuffing mouse-bile into a thrush that he had left alone while he used the dirtplace.

That one got me a stern talking to from Bluestar and Whitestorm.

Not having anyone to share tongues with or go hunting with really hit me hard. It blurred my thoughts and made me desperate.

One time Firepaw was coming back from a hunting assignment, and he didn't look very happy. A quick look at his jaws showed that he had only caught a measly mouse. It looked like it was incredibly old

and possibly sick.

Before I could think of what I was saying, the words slipped out, "Maybe if you didn't stand out and didn't reek of twoleg, you would've caught something useful."

The look of hurt in Firepaw's eyes made me ache. "It's still leafbare! What do you want me to do, play dead and let birds find me and then catch them as they peck at my eyes?" he responded.

Firepaw was right, this leafbare was not being friendly to the clan, and it's not like it was his fault that he had such a bright coat. I didn't want to hurt him again, but at this point, it was too late, and I was still desperate to get Dustpaw back, so I doubled down. "Maybe you should *really* be dead! Then we wouldn't have to worry about feeding your bottomless mouth!"

I may have said that too loud, as I drew the attention of nearby clanmates. A few of them looked really taken back, especially Greypaw.

I agree that I took that to far, as when I looked back at Firepaw there were tears welling up in his eyes. Before I could apologize for what I said, he had already dropped his mouse in the fresh-kill pile and ran to the apprentice's den.

The worst part about all of this is that it didn't even get Dustpaw back to talking with me. He wasn't in the camp during my outburst, so he didn't hear any of what I said, plus no one really talked about it out loud because they didn't want to hurt Firepaw's feelings or bring him further into the spotlight than he already was.

And even with the quiet gossip of my outburst spreading around the camp, Dustpaw still refused to talk to me. I tried a few more times to get Dustpaw back, making jokes about Firepaw around him, or scoffing slightly when no one else was looking. I even brought him fresh-kill every once in a while.

After almost a moon of Dustpaw fully ignoring me, I finally decided enough was enough, and I went to go talk to him.

"Dustpaw?" I asked as I approached him. He was laying on his side on one of the stone at the edge of the camp, sunbathing.

He opened one eye to look at me, and then closed it again. He acted as though I hadn't said anything to him at all.

"Come on, Dustpaw. So I cheered on Firepaw during his initiation. I was just trying to fit in! I didn't mean that I actually liked him."

Dustpaw just scoffed in response, and still didn't open his eyes.

"Just because I did that doesn't mean you get to ignore me! I didn't do anything-"

"Yes you did! You explained it yourself. You tried to fit in!" Dustpaw finally opened his eyes and started to stand up. "By fitting in, you effectively betrayed me. I thought we were a team! Darkstripe and Tigerclaw say that anyone who tries to 'fit in' just so that they don't 'stand in the spotlight' is weak! And that's what you are!"

"Weak?! So just because I congratulated a cat on their acceptance into the clan makes me weak?"

"Yes, it does."

Now my tail was starting to lash back and forth in anger. "I bet if it had been another clan cat, like from Riverclan, or even *Shadowclan* you wouldn't have been as upset! What's so different about Firepaw? He's still a cat like the rest of us!"

"No he's not!" Dustpaw exclaimed, now fully stood up. "He's a *kittypet*. A fake cat! He's not a real cat like the rest of us! It's like Longtail said, 'Once a kittypet, always a kittypet'."

"Oh, what's it with you and those three? It's like you, Longtail, and Darkstripe worship the ground that Tigerclaw walks on. And you've been horrible since Darkstripe was made your mentor!"

"Darkstripe is a great mentor! He teaches me to not follow blindly!"

"Well yeah, that's a good thing, until it makes you so blind to the truth that you can't even see you're whiskers!"

Dustpaw gasped in almost disbelief, "Truth?! You cheer on Firepaw and you think you know truth? You're just like him! *He's* blinding *you* to the truth!"

My eyes were beginning to tear up from how much Dustpaw was insulting me. We were inseparable only a moon ago, and now here he was, calling me blind and weak. "You're proving my point! The only truth you see is Tigerclaw! He's strong and loyal, sure, but he blinds himself with his illusion of how great he is! And you're falling right into that trap!"

"And he is great! He deserves to be deputy, not Lionheart, or even Redtail! The only reason they were made deputies is because Bluestar is friends with them! Lionheart is too lenient to be a deputy, and Redtail was too weak!"

My tears had finally started flowing, and I couldn't stand to look at him anymore. "Redtail made up for his size with his brain! Tigerclaw doesn't even have that, and you still think that he's the right cat to follow." I quickly turned around, intending to go back to the apprentices den to be by myself.

"At least Tigerclaw is still alive!"

I snarled in anger and before I knew what I was doing, there was blood seeping though a gash in Dustpaw's cheek. We both stood there, staring at each other, before Dustpaw turned and walked towards the Spottedleaf's den.

I turned as well and sprinted to the apprentice's den, crashing into my nest and covering my eyes with my tail as the tears began to pour.

Firepaw, who was sat in his nest, turned to look at me, rightfully shocked. "Are you-"

"Shut up!" I cried, "This is your fault!"

Firepaw continued to look at me, and then shrugged and left the den. I only cried harder.

✧✧✧

When I woke up the next morning, Dustpaw was already out of the den. I sighed and pushed myself up onto my paws, giving myself a quick morning groom.

Before I finished, Firepaw also woke up and started to groom himself as well. Seeing him gave me an idea.

I'm still not proud of thinking that this would be a good idea to get back Dustpaw, or leading on Firepaw like I did. But back then I was a desperate she-cat. Jealousy was the only thing I could think of.

I must have been staring at him too long, because eventually he stuttered, "What did I do?"

"What?" I said, shaking myself out of my stare. "You did nothing!"

Firepaw let out a long breath. "But why are you being... Uh... Not mean right now?"

I narrowed my eyes, suddenly not as nice. "Are you calling me *mean*?"

Firepaw leaned back in defense and shook his head strongly. "No! I mean, you're just..." he kept stumbling over his words.

"Well, out with it."

"Most of the time when you see me you show a... uh... a strong disliking towards me, in particular."

I rolled my eyes. That was true, but it wasn't from a place of real hate. "Well, dummy," I meowed wryly, "I wasn't going to murder you, as assumed. I was actually going to ask if you go around the forest with me."

Firepaw's eyes shone brightly as he smiled. "Don't be too flattered," I said, "You're my last choice. I was going to ask your two other friends, but *one* is snoring his head off next to you and the other is Starclan knows where."

"Where's Dustpaw?" He asked, his head tilted to one side.

I sighed a little bit. "We're not speaking to each other." I rolled my eyes, "All because I decided to cheer-"

"So you're asking to do something with me because you and Dustpaw are quarreling?" He huffed.

I shrugged and turned around. "If you want to some, then come," I ordered over my shoulder.

Firepaw quickly finished grooming himself and padded after me, suddenly very excited to be heading out into the forest with me.

As we exited the camp, I tried to start up a conversation, saying, "So... did you finish all of your duties yesterday, or do you still have things to do today?"

Firepaw hesitated for a second, and then shook his head. "We did most of our work last night, before you came crashing into the den and told me to shut up." I recoiled slightly in embarrassment. But then Firepaw also suddenly looked very defensive. "And then this morning, we were supposed to join the dawn patrol. But it's not my fault! Greypaw said he would wake me up when we had to go, but obviously you can see that that didn't happen. And then they left without us!"

I rolled my eyes. "Toms," I muttered.

Then Firepaw did the same thing, rolling his eyes and retorting, "She-cats."

I purred in amusement and picked my pace up into a trot. "I'll race you to the Riverclan border!" I yowled suddenly, giving no time for Firepaw to react. I burst into a sprint, leaving Firepaw dazed and stuck in his tracks. Finally, he gathered himself and chased after me.

"Hey, that's not fair!" Firepaw exclaimed, try to carry his voice past the wind that was rushing between us. "You didn't give me a chance!"

"You won't be given any chances in battle!" I threw back over my shoulder. I heard Firepaw growl, and suddenly I could feel his

breath on my tail.

I might have been going a little bit too easy on him, so I picked up my pace a little bit, ensuring that I maintained a stable lead.

I continued to sprint through the forest, the wind roaring in my ears and my paws pounding on paths paved by generations of cats. My chest was starting to get a little tight, but I pushed myself onwards. I noticed the river that separated Riverclan and Thunderclan come into view, and raced on determinedly.

I finally slowed to a halt moments before I reached the river, letting myself catch my breath. However, I only managed to get one or two good breaths until a flash of ginger shot by me and careened into the river with an alarmed yowl.

Firepaw resurfaced almost immediately, gasping from the cold of the river. I was very loudly meowing with laughter. I only laughed harder as firepaw struggled to get out of the river.

We both froze as we heard voices coming from the other side of the river. Firepaw obviously wasn't able to turn around and look, but I did. And I froze instantly.

Oh, Fox-dung. A Riverclan patrol was standing on the other side of the river.

Oh, double fox-dung. Leading the patrol was Oakheart, Crookedstar's brother.

Firepaw panicked and desperately scrambled to get out of the the river.

"Hey Fire kitty! What are you doing in Riverclan territory?" Firepaw gave up trying to exit the river, and turned around to face the angry patrol.

"I- I'm sorry," Firepaw stuttered, dipping his head as much as he could in the river. "We were just racing and I stopped too late and fell into the river."

Oakheart sighed. "Look, kit, we don't have time to be dealing with

naughty apprentices, and I'm sure neither does-" he broke off, an unreadable glint dancing across his eyes as he mentioned the next name. "*Bluestar*." He said Bluestar's name in a strange tone. Did they know each other?

Firepaw resumed struggling to get out of the river, but this time he asked for help. "*Sandpaw*!" he hissed, "Get me out of here!"

I snapped out of my shocked state and padded closer to the river's edge, cautiously digging my claws into the mud to keep my balance. I sank my teeth into his scruff and pulled. He whimpered from the pain, but otherwise didn't complain and pushed with his hind legs.

Firepaw was eventually pulled out, but he must have really been stuck, because we tumbled backwards and landed on top of each other. I stared into his emerald orbs for a few heartbeats, and then quickly looked away as both of our pelts heated up in embarrassment. Firepaw hastily hopped off.

We turned to look at the patrol their faces lit up with obvious amusement. Oakheart spoke once more. "Show your love for each other somewhere else more *private*," he meowed smugly. "But for now, don't let me catch you two ear Riverclan territory again, and telly your other friends while you're at it."

Firepaw and I dipped our heads. "Yes, Oakheart," I meowed solemnly. Firepaw repeated what I said.

Oakheart dipped his head and then turned. "Behave yourselves!" He called over his shoulder, and then was gone, takin ghis patrol with him.

Firepaw looked over at me sheepishly. "Uh... Sorry about that," He mumbled.

As mad as I was that he had managed to get us in trouble with Riverclan's deputy, I dismissed it quickly. "It's fine."

We walked back to camp silently, our pawsteps and the water from Firepaw's pelt hitting the ground lightly were the only sounds in the

forest.

Was it really that obvious for a grown cat to tell? I wondered. Oakheart had immediately guessed that we were in love. And while I'm not sure if that's true for *one* of us...

"Did we just break the warrior code?" Firepaw asked shakily.

I flicked my tail. "I don't know. we did kind of trespass by accident," I stated.

"Will Bluestar find out?"

"Let's hope not. I don't think Oakheart will tell her though."

I heard Firepaw breath a heavy sigh of relief. "At least that was fun."

As much as I hated to admit it, I shared the same feelings.

✧✧✧

"Where were you?" Dustpaw asked almost as soon as we got back. It didn't sound angry at all, but I might have taken it as that just because we hadn't talked in so long.

"Out with Firepaw."

Dustpaw sighed. "Look, I've come to realize that you may have been right. I still don't like that you cheered for Firepaw, but after some thought, there are certainly worse things that you could do. And pushing you away was stupid."

I smiled. "And I guess I'm sorry for clawing you in the cheek."

"So can we go back to being friends?" He asked tentatively.

"Of course, you dummy," I meowed goofily, swiping his ears with my paws.

The next morning, I was back to ignoring the Firepaw trio. I saw Firepaw sigh when he saw me and dustpaw sharing tongues away

from the others. That made me wonder if he didn't actually hate us, as many reasons as we gave him to. Maybe he just wanted to have more friends.

❂----------❂

Word count - 2570

❂----------❂

Author's Note

✧

Woohoo, almost two months. Like I said, so definitive schedule. I promise I'm always working on the next chapters, sometimes I just either do't have time, get too preoccupied with other things, or just can't find inspiration to write.

And I'm afraid to mention that college starts next month and I don't know if I'll be able to write at all. Hopefully my roommate is chill.

Sorry to the three of you who read this.

Also this might be the last chance for everyone to guess the meanings of the chapters. Here they are again.

I. Before the Fire

II. Virtrification

III. Shards

IV. Infinity

PLEASE guess in the comments!

See y'all in the next one!

✧

- Maple -

- 7 ▫ 4 ▫ 2024 -

(Happy independence day)

✧ T H R E E ✧

❂► T H E U N T O L D ◄❂

V I T R I F I C A T I O N

✧

T H R E E

❂----------❂

IT WAS incredibly hard for me to learn of Ravenpaw's "passing". At the time, when I didn't know anything about Firepaw and Greypaw's plan, and I took it hard, but part of how bad I felt was thinking about how hard it must have been for Dustpaw. The poor cat lost his brother way too early for anyone's taste. I'm glad we saw that he never really died when we left for The Lake.

What was harder than that, at least for me, was the fact that Firepaw and Greypaw weren't "Firepaw" and "Greypaw" anymore. Now they were Fire*heart* and Grey*stripe*. Before I was Sand*storm*. And that pissed me off. Especially back in the days where I was confused about how much I cared for Fireheart. And now they were being sent on this secret mission that no one, not even the deputy knew the details of.

Believe me, I asked.

So during that time I was practically glued to Dustpaw's side, comforting him throughout his grief while also dealing with my own dilemmas.

Or really, dilemma.

See while it had been hard losing Ravenpaw, it was somehow harder being in the camp without Greypaw and Firepaw. Those two, despite how annoying they were, brought life to the camp, from bickering elders to squealing kits. Without them, the camp was eerily quiet. And I missed the noise.

By Starclan, I thought in disgust, *I miss* Fireheart*, of all cats.*

The night before Fireheart and Greystripe made their infamous return, Whitestorm finally manage to peel me away from Dustpaw's side for long enough to force me to go training with him.

"We'll start in the training hollow today, and keep it light since I know you're still grieving", Whitestorm explained. I nodded in response and begrudgingly followed him out of the camp.

When we reached the training hollow, Whitestorm had me stand on the other side of the clearing.

"Today we're going to work on your defense. I'm going to try to knock you over. Obviously, try not to keep me from doing that. If you do get knocked over, try and escape, alright?"

I nodded once again in response.

Whitestorm's gaze softened, "You're less talkative than usual, still that sad about Ravenpaw, huh?"

That was the thing I loved most about Whitestorm. He was incredibly concerned about everyone's well-being. In this case he was wrong though.

While I was still sad about Ravenpaw's "passing" and would be for the rest of my life, that wasn't what my brain was focusing on. I was more focused on the fact that I was missing Fireheart, and how weird that was for me.

Sure, we had that little outing around the forest, but that was just one time compared to the hundreds of hours that I'd spent with Dustpaw and Ravenpaw. So it made no sense that I was so distraught that Fireheart wasn't in camp.

"I guess", I responded.

"Alright, get ready, I'm going to attack soon", Whitestorm explained.

I widened my stance and bent my head slightly, preparing for Whitestorm's attack. He began circling me at a brisk pace, every now again changing directions in an attempt to throw me off. But I turned my body with him, keeping my head even with his.

Then a flash of orange caught my eye.

Fireheart? He's back?

My eyes widened as something barreled into my side and I crashed to the ground with a loud "Oomph". I opened my eyes up to see a large white cat on top of me, pinning me down and churning at my belly with his sheathed paws.

"Come on", Whitestorm taunted, "Surely *the* Sandpaw can deal with being pinned." I growled in response and threw a few measly paw swipes at his face, but the angle at which my limbs were pinned left a lot to be desired from their power.

I sneaked a look of to the side where I had seen the orange, only to be extremely disappointed. *A leaf? I was tricked by a leaf?*

Since my attacks weren't working, I tried to feint that I had given up, going limp and stopping my paw swipes.

"Nice try, but unfortunately that move won't work on a warrior such as myself", Whitestorm calmly got off of me, "You're usually better than this, Sandpaw. I know losing Ravenpaw is hard, but you can't let that get in the way of your training." He sighed, "Let's try hunting, maybe you're just having an off day."

Hunting proved to not be any better than my fighting skills, after two hours of hunting, I had only managed to catch one sickly mouse.

"It's nearly leaf-bare", Whitestorm tried to console me, "So every piece of fresh-kill counts. Even that mouse."

Then he suddenly stopped and tasted the air. "I smell a squirrel. Catch this and then we can rest for the rest of the day, alright? I'll stay here and watch."

I stiffly nodded and opened my mouth to taste the air as well, pinpointing the direction of the squirrel. I dropped into the familiar hunter's crouch, and stalked forward, determined to show that I still had some worth.

The squirrel was mindlessly pecking a fallen acorns, occasionally stuffing one into his mouth. But it was still unaware of me growing ever closer.

Just three more steps. I judged, keeping my eyes trained on the unsuspecting prey.

Suddenly, the squirrel's head shot up and it locked eyes with me.

Then I froze, completely still as we locked eyes. The squirrel's eyes were bright green, just like Fireheart's.

That's weird...

Unfortunately, by the time I shook myself out of my thoughts, the squirrel was already halfway up the nearest tree, and there was no way I was going to catch it.

Fox-dung.

I turned around and stalked back to where Whitestorm was watching, his face screwed in confusion. "Why did you hesitate there? Even with the squirrel looking at you, you still could have caught it."

I didn't respond, instead just dropping my head.

"Are you sure it's just Ravenpaw on your mind? It seems like you're distracted by a lot more than just that."

Seeing that I still wasn't planning on answering, Whitestorm continued. "You know that you can tell me anything. I won't spread any secrets. Swear to Starclan."

I looked up at him, trying to read his gaze. He seemed genuine, as always, so I decided to tentatively open up.

"What- Say you felt like you were naturally supposed to not like someone, and you've been told that you're not supposed to like that someone, but despite that you still really like them. What would you do?"

Whitestorm smirked. "It almost sounds as though you're talking about a certain ginger cat there, Sandpaw."

"I didn't say that!" I protested.

Whitestorm's whisker's twitched in amusement. "Of course you didn't. Well, I'm not very experienced in the area of "forbidden love", but emotions are certainly more powerful than rules. And love is without a doubt the strongest of these emotions.

"It is love that allows mothers to protect their kits, even to death. And it is by love that a cat is able to lift extreme weight off of the people they care about." Whitestorm licked a paw and drew it over his ear. "So, in my opinion, you shouldn't let some silly ideas made up generations ago get in the way of how you feel about someone. And you certainly shouldn't let some other cat tell you how to feel about things."

I gave him a confused look, "That's too many words for me to understand."

Whitestorm audibly laughed and began to walk away, gesturing for me to follow him. "To put it simply, you can't let others tell you who you love. Only you know that."

I nodded, pretending like I understood him, and continued to follow him as we headed back towards camp.

✧ ✧ ✧

After that talked with Whitestorm, I unknowingly distanced myself more and more from Dustpaw. Suddenly, asking Fireheart to go out

in the forest with me was becoming more than just a way to make Dustpaw jealous, it was becoming an activity that I genuinely enjoyed.

Of course, I never let Fireheart know this. I still hade it seem like he was my last choice, or I pretended that I was dead bored, or something of the like.

Dustpaw and I never really rekindled the friendship we had back then until we both arrived here in Starclan, which I still regret. In reality, Greystripe, Firestar and I kind of left him in the dust behind us.

I think the day that Dustpaw finally got over me distancing from him was when Fernpaw fighting with Cinderpelt against Scourge and BloodClan. I knew by the way that he looked at her that he had finally found happiness.

I'm glad he ended up alright.

❂----------❂

Word Count - 1454

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Author's Note

✧

Thanks to @WoF_and_WC_fan for giving me the idea for this chapter! There will be another chapter that he gave the idea for, so e on the lookout for that!

And there will be more opportunities to give me ideas for chapters!

✧

Hey hey hey, another chapter! And it's been four months!

I'm in college now, so I both have more time to write but also less time to write. More free time but I'm usually sleeping.

But I wrote out the layout for the last chapter of this section, and let's just say that I'm incredibly excited to write it, so this book ain't goin' nowhere.

I know this chapter was a little bit shorter, and I apologize for that, but I didn't want to keep you all waiting longer than you had to, and I didn't know if I could finish everything I wanted to write.

I have ideas for the next chapter already, so I'll get started on that right away!

✧

- Maple -

- 11 ▫ 9 ▫ 2024 -

✧ F O U R ✧

❂► T H E U N T O L D ◄❂

V I T R I F I C A T I O N

✧

F O U R

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Fireheart being best friends with Greystripe was like Starclan demanding more chaos from the clans. While those two were inseparable and would do anything for each other, that same logic always seemed to end up getting them in trouble, or at least causing some type of trouble for everyone else.

They even met when they were both misbehaving. Fireheart obviously wasn't supposed to be in the forest hunting, at least that's what I assumed from Twolegs. And Greystripe was supposed to stick by Lionheart's side while they were out in the territory, unless otherwise specified to do so.

Yet the two of them simply being mischievous led them too meeting and Fireheart joining the clan.

One of those "trouble" times had to of course be right now. Tigerclaw must have been expecting this, because after hearing Greystripe's unmistakeable screech, he had turned and immediately sprinted off in one direction, barely beckoning for the rest of our patrol to follow.

So here we were, chasing after a sprinting Tigerclaw towards

Riverclan's territory, nerves twitching in anticipation for the unavoidable conflict we were sure to be in.

Sure enough, after cresting a small hill that was obstructing our view, we could clearly see two groups of cats fighting near the gorge. Tigerclaw sped up his gait, forcing the rest of our patrol to follow suit as we neared the fighting.

Once we reached the battleground, I leapt at a silver Riverclan tabby who was pinning down a Windclan warrior, sending us both tumbling away. We sprang to our feet simultaneously, staring each other down cautiously, waiting for the other cat to make the first move.

"Thunderclan meddles too often with the business of other clans", the tabby sneered, her hackles raised as she began to circle me.

I followed suit, keeping my distance. "Riverclan seems to be doing the same right now", I replied.

"We're merely defending out territory from brash trespassers!" She exclaimed, finally breaking the stalemate and leaping at me.

I rose up on my hind paws to meet her, but wasn't prepared enough for her weight and crashed down onto my back with an "oomph".

I made a face that was a mix of struggle and amusement as she pinned me, somewhere between a grimace and a smirk, and said, "Leave it to the Riverclan cat to use her weight in battle."

The silver she-cat gasped in offense, beginning to pummel my body with paw swipes. "Fox-heart!" she yelled.

Unfortunately, she had left my hind paws unpinned, so I brought them up to the tabby's midsection and pushed, this time accounting for her weight, and launched her off of me, sending her in the direction of the gorge.

I quickly got back on my feet and chased after her like how I would chase after a rabbit. She scrambled onto her feet as fast as she could and sidestepped out of my path.

I didn't expect this, so I planted one paw to change direction quickly, just how Whitestorm had taught me.

But my eyes widened in shock as my paw slipped on the still-damp grass, and my body continued rolling towards the cliff of the gorge. I desperately swung my claws around, trying to find anything, a stone, a dry patch of grass, to dig my claws into and stop my movement. But nothing was there.

I screeched as I felt my legs roll over the edge of the gorge, and suddenly my mind was clouded with memories of past times.

I saw Brindleface watching as Dustkit showed me around the camp for the first time, the love so clear in her green eyes. Our green eyes.

I saw Dustpaw misstep during a training sessions, and Greypaw and I laughing hysterically.

I saw Firepaw receive his warrior name, and felt some kind of pride deep in my heart.

I even felt myself gently being pulled up to Starclan by someone. "I've got you", they mumbled, as if my scruff was in their mouth. I saw ginger paws next to two of my own on solid ground. Kittypet paws. *Fireheart's* paws.

Suddenly, my mind cleared, and I realized that I wasn't dead yet. I flailed my hind paws against the rocky cliff, finally finding a hold to push up on while Fireheart dragged me by my scruff.

Adrenaline rushing and finally having four paws on the ground, I spun around to Fireheart and spat, "I can fight my own battles, *kittypet*!"

Huh? I thought as soon as I said that. *Why did I say- That's not what happened.*

But it was too late to say anything else, or take it back. The damage to Fireheart had already been done, and plus yet another screech, the third today, rang out next to us.

We both snapped in its direction to see Greystripe staring over the edge of the gorge, his lips spread in a gasp and his eyes wide.

The entire battleground became eerily silent as Fireheart and I looked over the edge just in time to see a black and white cat crash into the river below.

"Whiteclaw!" Leopardfur called. Receiving no call back, not even a distant gurgle, she turned to face Tigerclaw, who was also starring over the edge, shocked evident even in his gaze. "Riverclan will not easily forget this battle. We will have our vengeance", then, turning to address the rest of Riverclan, she said, "Riverclan, retreat! We've lost one today, we don't need more joining Starclan."

With that, Riverclan withdrew, leaving our patrol, Fireheart, Greystripe, and Windclan left.

Tigerclaw turned to both Greystripe and Fireheart. I recoiled in apprehensive pain as I imagined the angry lecture the two warriors were about to receive.

"Bluestar will hear about this", Tigerclaw said, his voice icy cold.

I was incredibly surprised that there wasn't more added onto that.

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Fireheart and Greystripe got a stern talking to from both Tigerclaw and Bluestar later that day, but Whiteclaw's death had had only minimally affected me.

My main issue was that I still felt overwhelmingly guilty about what I said to Fireheart, but I hadn't been able to talk to him next few moons. I tried to just go up to him and say sorry a bunch of times, but he was always caught up in some warrior duty, or I was training, or something or another.

Other than that, I had mostly kept this entire ordeal myself, because even I didn't fully understand what was going on and why I was feeling this way.

By this time I had accepted Fireheart as a member of the clan. As

envious as I was about him becoming a warrior, there are qualities someone must portray to be promoted to warrior. And obviously, Fireheart had some of those qualities, one of which he displayed at the gorge.

But with what I had said to him as soon as he saved me, I had both shown that I was ungrateful, and that I didn't yet have the qualities needed to be an honorable warrior.

So I wanted to apologize for three reasons. The first is to improve my qualities so I could become a warrior. Secondly, I didn't want to be a jerk.

And I'm sure you can guess the third.

But how could you apologize to someone that you've only ever been mean to? Sure, we had that one day out in the forest, but even that had ulterior motives.

I decided that the best course of action would be to talk to Whitestorm about what was going on. There was no point in doing the whole "hypothetically..." thing, he would know that I was talking about Fireheart.

Fortunately, a few days after the whole incident Whitestorm and I were given a patrol to just check up on the border near the twolegplace, so I had the perfect opportunity to talk to him.

"Hey Whitestorm", I said as soon as we were out of earshot of camp. "Can I get some advice?"

Whitestorm turned his ears in my direction but otherwise stayed in his gait. "What's up?" He asked.

"So I've... not nice to Fireheart, right?" I began. Upon receiving a nod from Whitestorm, I continued, "Well, at the gorge a few moons ago, he kind of saved me from falling off of the cliff."

"You must be pretty grateful then." It's like he knew what I was thinking before I said anything.

"Well, *now* I am. Issue is that I was kind of a jerk right after it

happened."

"Oh Starclan..." He began, "What did you say?"

"Something about how I didn't need him to help me."

Whitestorm shook his head is disbelief and chuckled. "Not much worse you could've said. So now you want to apologize?"

Like I said. It's like he always knew. Even here in Starclan he does the same thing sometimes.

"Yeah, but I feel like since he's come to the clan I've only been mean to him. And now I have to apologize to him? Like I want to do it but it's incredibly embarrassing. What am I supposed to say to him?"

"Other than just saying you're sorry for..."

"For being a jerk?"

"Yeah, that", Whitestorm chuckled, and then paused for a moment before continuing, "But I suppose that you don't actually have to *tell* him that, right?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you don't have to *tell* him you're sorry. You can show him."

I was confused. "How am I supposed to show him that I'm sorry?"

"Well, you two went out in the forest that one time, right?"

I cringed in shame, "How do you know about that?"

"Oakheart was telling a few of the other senior warriors about it after it happened. Don't worry, nobody told Bluestar. But that's besides the point. You two obviously enjoyed your time then, why don't you just invite him out again?"

"I would, but wouldn't he just think that I was doing it because Dustpaw and I were fighting again? He figured that out last time."

"That's true." Whitestorm paused again to ponder. "I suppose that I could have him take you out 'hunting' tomorrow. Give an excuse for being sick or having to talk with Bluestar."

"Would you? That'd make it so much easier!" I pleaded.

"Of course", he said, "But you have to actually be yourself around him. Don't treat him like an outsider, treat him like you would your best friend in the world. Maybe sneak in a 'sorry' once you guys have spent some times together."

"Yeah yeah, I won't be mean to him for once."

"Who knows, maybe you two will be friends forever after that too."

I scoffed in response. "Don't get your hopes up."

I think we might have taken the idea of "friends forever" a little bit too far.

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Word Count - 1763

❂----------❂

Author's Note

✧

Another thanks to @WoF_and_WC_fan for giving me the idea for this chapter! I was going to write about it either way, but it coming up so soon is thanks to him.

And never fear! There will opportunities in the future for others to be able to give me ideas!

✧

I did say that I was not gonna set a schedule, right? I'm kind of just writing whenever I get the motivation too, and this time I owe it to the many author's who have written FirexSand one-shots where

Fireheart is worried about the clan or something or another.

(Definitely will be a future chapter btw)

Also, a happy early one-year birthday to this book, come the 7th!

Like usual, no promises for the next chapter, but I do already have the plot line for it laid out.

And expect these chapters to be more like this is length, rather than the 2k+ words chapters in the beginning of the book.

✧

- Maple -

- 3 ▫ 5 ▫ 2025 -

✧ F I V E ✧

THE UNTOLD

VITRIFICATION

✧

FIVE

THE NEXT DAY was one of the most influential of my life, and also one of my favorites. It was the first time I spent almost an entire day alone with Firestar, and I really enjoyed myself. I think I fully fell for him that day while we were out and about, "hunting", but more playing like little kits.

I sat patiently by the entrance to camp, pretending to wait for Whitestorm to take me out hunting. The plan was that I was going to act like nothing was different as to not raise any suspicion and to make it less awkward for myself. Then Whitestorm was going to ask Fireheart to take me hunting in his place because he had "incredibly important business" with Bluestar.

I shook my fur and fluffed out my pelt as much as I could. Leafbare had brought with it cold and dry weather, and although it was getting warmer than it was earlier in the season, I was ready to be rid of the snow and have more prey to hunt.

I breathed a sigh of relief as I saw Whitestorm approach Fireheart as he exited the warrior's den. Finally, I'd be able to get moving and warm up. And get this over with.

I tensed up as I saw them look in my direction, quickly glancing away and pretending not to notice their stares.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Whitestorm head towards

Bluestar's den and Fireheart begin to make his way towards me. I began to groom my fur like I had no idea what was going on, licking my paw and drawing it over my ears.

"Hey Sandpaw, uhh..." He began, awkwardly.

"What," I spat in fake annoyance. Inside I was just as awkward as he was and also incredibly nervous.

Fireheart scuffed his paw against the ground, continuing, "Whitestorm said that I need to take you to check the Riverclan border. Do some hunting along the way. He's busy doing something with Bluestar, so it's just you and me."

That's not what we agreed on, I thought, *Great. This'll be a lot more talking.*

"Okay. Are we leaving right now?" I asked, much less annoyed than before.

"I don't see any reason why not", he concluded, moving past me and brushing through the bramble entrance to the camp. I hastily trotted after him, quickly catching up and trodding next to him as we made our way towards the Riverclan border.

For the first few minutes, the outside world was quiet, but internally I was destroying myself over how to start a conversation.

"Hey Fireheart, sorry for being a jerk to you and making your life horrible"- No, that's dumb. And too blunt.

"Hey Fireheart, can we be friends now"- No, worse. I shook my head to clear my thoughts, which unfortunately, Fireheart noticed.

"You okay?" He mumbled.

I pretended to cough and fluffed out my pelt. "Yeah, the cold is just getting to me a little bit."

Fireheart nodded. "This Leafbare is lasting a little bit longer than usual. Even the prey is starting to come back, like they're also expecting the air to warm."

I nodded in response, and we dove back into the agonizingly awkward silence.

Eventually, it got to the point where I was thinking to myself again.

This is so awful, I should have never done this.

I'm never like this when I'm out with Dustpaw, why is this so hard? I just have to say sorry. Or show him or whatever Whitestorm was saying.

Maybe I just act like I would with Dustpaw? I turned to look at Fireheart, who was a stride ahead of me and not paying attention to what I was doing, probably in his own thoughts.

Screw it, it's the best idea I have, I decided, pausing and digging my paws into the snow, bundling the white powder into a small ball.

I threw it at Fireheart, and giggled as he turned around in offense, wide-eyed. "Hey! What was that for?"

I laughed, louder now, and raced away, calling over my shoulder, "Catch me if you can!"

I smiled as I ran, and smiled even wider as I realized that this smile was genuine, like the ones I would share with Redtail and Brindleface back when I was a kit.

As I leapt over a fallen tree, I tucked myself into a small ditch adjacent to the tree, hiding away. I heard Fireheart land over the tree, and look around, confused. "Sandpaw?" He called, "Where are you?"

I waited for him to walk right past me, and then leapt out of my hiding spot and on top of him, tumbling over each other as we rolled down a small hill.

I laughed again as we rolled, and we traded paw swipes, and best as we could since we were essentially flailing down the hill.

Once we reached the bottom, we sprang apart, Fireheart getting into a defensive crouch while I just sat down and started licking my paw.

"What are you doing?" He snarled, surprisingly angry as he crouched further.

I stopped licking my paw and focused on him. "Huh? What do you mean?"

Now he stood up, and looked incredibly confused. "We were just fighting?"

"We were? I thought we were playing", I responded, now mirroring his confusion.

"Playing?" He spat, almost exasperatedly. "Why would you play with me?"

Seeing my still confused look, he continued, "You've spent the last Starclan-knows-how-many moons terrorizing me at every chance you get!"

That's pretty true...

"Even that one time you asked me to go into the forest with you, you just did it to get back at Dustpaw!"

"That was only part of it! There were other reasons-"

He scoffed in response, "I have a hard time believing that! It's like ever since that happened, my life has just gone downhill! First my apprentice gets hit by a Monster, then Greystripe and I fight, and now here you are, probably pretending to have fun with me so that Dustpaw will be jealous again!"

But I am having fun!

Now Fireheart was pacing back and forth in front of me, continuing to ramble on, "I work so hard just to *try* to prove that I'm not a liability in this clan, but even when that works, cats like *you* are still filled with hate for me!"

Those words echoed in the empty leafbare forest, Fireheart once again in a defensive crouch, now staring me down like he would a Shadowclan warrior.

"*I don't... hate you.*"

Suddenly Fireheart stood up quickly, tilting his head, confused.

Crap, did I say that out loud?

"What did you say?" He asked.

A long silence filled the air as I refused to repeat what I had just said, thoughts whirling around in my head.

Fox-dung, he definitely heard that!

He was mad before, is he going to be more mad now?

That doesn't count as an apology!

Way to screw it up Sandpaw, now he'll never forgive you!

I could feel Fireheart's gaze piercing me as the silence dragged on, and I scuffed my paw against the ground.

Eventually, Fireheart's gaze broke, and he said, "We should probably get back to our patrol."

I nodded my head rapidly in agreement, thankful for the escape out of the awkward situation. However, I was still incredibly stressed out about how he was going to receive what I said.

The rest of our patrol went by without a hitch, although it was definitely easier to go without hitches when neither of us spoke a single word. Fireheart was focused on the patrol, which I was thankful for, because my mind was racing a million miles per hour.

Whitestorm gives me a perfect opportunity and I can't do anything with it!

Forget apologizing, now I have to figure out how to make him not hate me!

I was saved from having to walk next to him when my nose picked up the scent of a rabbit nearby, which was pretty crazy considering

that it was still leafbare.

Rabbit is also my favorite meal, so I was happy when Fireheart also perked up, looked at me, and whispered, "All yours."

I got down into a hunter's crouch and turned myself in the direction of the rabbit's scent, beginning to slowly pace my way forward. Once the rabbit was in sight, I slowed down my movements even more, making sure each paw was placed softly, as I didn't want the rabbit to hear me coming.

As soon as I was within leaping range of the rabbit, I sprang forward, paws outstretched and claws unsheathed. I could see the rabbit's muscles tensing up, as it got ready to spring away from me. *Oh no you don't*, I thought as I reached my right paw further out to one side, latching onto it's tail as it tried to get away.

I hastily pulled the rabbit back to me and gave it a killing bite, making sure to thank Starclan for the meal. Then I turned around and trotted back to where Fireheart was waiting for me, rabbit dangling from my jaws.

"Nice catch", he said, still almost as quiet as a whisper. Seems like he was feeling just as awkward as I was.

We kind of just stood there for a second, not looking at each other but also not moving a muscle. The thing that finally made me look up was a low rumble that I heard coming from Fireheart.

When our eyes made contact, he gave an embarrassed chuckle, and explained, "Guess I'm kind of hungry."

I let the rabbit drop from my jaws and pushed it towards him. "We can share this, if you'd like."

Fireheart tilted his head quizzically. "Isn't that against the warrior code?"

I shrugged in response, "Maybe, but at this point it's well past midday. I'm sure that we're the only ones in the clan left who haven't eat anything today. Worst case, we can do some more hunting before we get back."

"Good point", he mumbled. "Well, I guess it wouldn't hurt." With that he crouched down and began to dig into the rabbit. I followed suit, placing myself directly across from him.

We ate like that for awhile, crouched on the cold forest floor with nothing and no one around us except for the trees of the forest and the rare call of a bird.

Which was the perfect environment to finally apologize, I just had to start talking.

Come on, Sandpaw, just start talking and the rest will come out naturally.

"Hey Fireheart..." I began.

Fireheart picked his head up, still chewing on a piece of rabbit meat. "Hmm?" He asked through his mouthful of food.

"Thanks for taking me out in Whitestorm's place today." I finished, barely getting the last few words out over my jitters.

"Just doing my warrior duty", he explained, finally swallowing that piece of rabbit meat. Then he continued on, much quieter this time, "Plus, I'm enjoying it, no matter how awkward it may be."

We both chuckled in response to that.

"You're not that bad when you're not being mean, Sandpaw."

I froze.

Where did that come from?

My heart filled with something that felt so incredibly warm and fuzzy that I wanted to wrap in on myself and hold my heart to heat myself against the cold weather. That warmth and fuzziness spread to the rest of my body, making my paws tingle and breathing quicken.

This warmth made it incredibly hard to make coherent sentences, unfortunately, so the next words out of my mouth were a bunch of

mumbo-jumbo. "I- Wha- I'm- no, I'm not-"

Fireheart laughed, much louder than our previous chuckles, and tried to calm me, saying, "Calm down, take your time!"

After some much needed deep breaths, I finally got out what I was trying to say. "I'm sorry", was all I managed.

"For what?" Fireheart questioned.

"For everything!" I snapped, suddenly very much able to make sentences, my words now blending together with how fast I rambled. "For being mean! For calling you a kittypet! For hating you, for using you, for making you confused, hurting you, pretending to like you, pretending to hate you, and... and... and everything else!"

Fireheart smiled. "So... you really *don't* hate me, huh?" I shook my head no, and now he beamed. "Great, then let's stop pretending to not be friends."

All these negative thoughts that I had were wildly radical, as after some conversation and reminiscing later in life with Firestar, I found out that he was actually very appreciative that I didn't hate him. In fact, he was never mad in the first place. The reason that he was so distant was because he thought that I didn't want to be around him at all.

Our friendship bloomed so rapidly that if felt like we could out-race a monster. It took awhile for Greystripe to fully accept - and probably process - me as their friend, but afterwards it was *mostly* smooth sailing.

The first big milestone was after Shadowclan had invaded our camp one night, and we fought them off. The next morning, Bluestar called a clan meeting. I presumed that this would just be an announcement regarding the battle the previous night, and while I was partially right, there was more to it than just that.

"Sandpaw, Dustpaw, please step forward", Bluestar said.

What? My eyes darted around the clearing, finding that every cat

was staring at Dustpaw and myself expectantly. Eventually, I locked onto Fireheart, who was brightly smiling. *Is this why he went into Bluestar's den last night?*

"Darkstripe, Whitestorm, are these two ready to become warriors?"

I took a deep breath in apprehension as I heard Whitestorm say, "I would say they are." Darkstripe nodded in agreement.

Bluestar smiled. "In that case, I, Bluestar, leader of Thunderclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentice. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to them as warriors in their turn.

"Sandpaw, Dustpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do", Dustpaw and I said in unison.

"Then by the powers of , I give you both your warrior names. Dustpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Dustpelt. StarClan honors your bravery and strength, and we welcome you as a full warrior of Thunderclan."

Dustpelt stepped up to Bluestar and respectfully licked her shoulder. I saw Bluestar mumble something in his ear, and then he stepped down.

"Dustpelt! Dustpelt! Dustpelt!" The clan cheered. Even Fireheart was making his voice heard.

"Sandpaw", I took a step forward. "From this moment on, you will be known as Sandstorm. Starclan honors your determination and quickness, ad we welcome you as a full warrior of Thunderclan."

I repeated what I saw Dustpelt do, and licked Bluestar's shoulder as she rested her head on top of mine.

"Redtail is smiling upon you from Starclan", she began, "He would be so proud. You've come so far, Sandstorm."

I nodded in thanks and turned to face the clan. "Sandstorm!

Sandstorm! Sandstorm!" They all cheered.

My eyes first found Brindleface, who was surprisingly flanked by both Fireheart and Dustpelt.

As I entered the crowd, the first two to greet me were my mother and Dustpelt. "Sandstorm! What a lovely name", Brindleface spoke as she wrapped around me, licking in between my ears just as she used to do when I was younger.

Dustpelt nodded in agreement, and his movement drew my gaze. "We're finally warriors now!" He exclaimed, excited like a kit trying solid food for the first time.

"That we are", I replied, and nudged him with my shoulder.

They moved past me and went their separate ways, Dustpelt going to talk with others and Brindleface doing what it is she went to do. The next one to greet me was the one and only.

"Took you long enough", he said, grassy eyes glistening with happiness.

"Shut up", I replied jokingly. "Why didn't you come with Brindleface and Dustpelt?"

"You grew up with them. I didn't want to get in the way. Plus, I'm still not entirely sure how Dustpelt sees me these days. Don't want to ruin the mood. I'll congratulate him later."

"You wouldn't get in the way!" I protested. "I mean, I can't help with Dustpelt, but whether we've known each other for three moons or thirty, you're still close. Don't feel like you're in a completely separate category!" My face began to heat up as I realized what I had just said.

"Aww, really?" Fireheart teased, "You really think we're close now?"

"Shut up! You knew what I meant!" I objected, weakly.

Fireheart let out one of his famous hearty laughs, and that night continued with more of the same, more cats congratulating me,

with jokes being thrown around left and right. Eventually, that fun came to an end and I say my vigil with Dustpelt.

Dustpelt started off that night incredibly tense, which sank my spirits. Ever since Fireheart and I had gotten closer, I'd spent less and less time with my denmate, and he still seemed rather hostile about it.

Thankfully, by the end of the night, he was much more relaxed than before, and by the time we were allowed to break our vigil, he was even able to chat with me before we took naps.

I'm glad we got to spend that last night together alone. Even if we weren't able to talk to each other, I felt that we were able to repair a chasm that appeared in our relationship due to Fireheart entering the equation.

Word count - 2880

Author's Note

✧

Hey, this one didn't take too long, did it?

DO NOT EXPECT ANY CHAPTERS TO COME OUT THIS QUICK! I would love to be able to write that quickly and get more chapters out faster, but I, like all other writers, am human and have other things going on, whether it be school or lacrosse or just not having any motivation.

That being said, I *do* have the plot for the next chapter set, and I really don't have to write a lot for it, since it will be parallel with a Lunar-Serenity chapter. So if you want a sneak peek at the next chapter, you'll have to go and read their book.

Until the next one!

✧

- Maple -

- 3 ▫ 24 ▫ 2025 -

✧ S I X ✧

❂► T H E U N T O L D ◄❂

V I T R I F I C A T I O N

✧

S I X

❂----------❂

WHEN I WAS a kit, and honestly throughout my apprenticeship and even into being a warrior, the idea of having my own kits disgusted me. Hearing the painful cries of Queens during kitting didn't help with that at all. And whenever I went in to visit the kits, the mothers looked completely wiped out, no matter how old the kits were. I could not by any means imagine myself in that position.

Parallel to this, I - very childishly - decided that as a kit that when I was older, I would never have a mate. This thought died a lot quicker than the one about kits, and I laugh about even thinking such a thing now in Starclan.

However, the no-kits mentality stayed a lot longer than that. It stayed through Firestar joining the clan, through the battle at the gorge, even past when I started developing a greater care for the ginger fur-ball.

But that all changed when I actually tried "mothering" for the first time.

After the battle with Tigerclaw and his group of rogues, everyone was wiped out, and the mood in the camp was not very good. Fireheart, being the ever-so-noble cat he is, decided that he needed to add some livelihood to the camp, and what better way to do that then getting the apprentices hyper.

So we asked around, making sure our idea was okay with all of the

mentors. Once we got the go-ahead, we gathered all of the apprentices together, and went out an a massive border/hunting patrol.

Fireheart was absolutely incredible that day. He seemed a little unsure of what to do at first, but once we got further into the patrol, he came up with some fun little games for the apprentices to play, and telling them stories both about his past life and the legends of the clans.

I did my best too, taking on a motherly role. I made sure everyone was always accounted for, encouraged them, and made sure they were having fun. It felt surprisingly natural.

But we weren't just having fun either. Every time anyone scented prey, it was time to learn, and the apprentices learned fast. They fixed their posture in their crouches, corrected their stalking, and became a lot more alert and aware when we passed by borders.

The younger ones that had yet to learn much about the ways of a warrior padded along under Fireheart and I's bellies, occasionally pausing to check out a weird scent or chase a butterfly.

Eventually, we decided to take a break from patrolling, and let the apprentices waste off some energy while Fireheart and I rested our legs. We sat down by the river, and kept one eye on the playing apprentices while we chatted.

As we chatted, I tried to catch Fireheart's eye, just to try to spark a moment between us. I had finally come to terms with the fact that I was in love with the former kittypet, and was kind of anxious to get things moving.

This should have worked, because I saw him basically drilling holes into my pelt when I wasn't looking, but every time I looked in his direction, his head whipped back to either staring forwards or towards the apprentices.

Fireheart was saved from me just getting up and sitting in front of him when a very serious looking Cloudpaw padded up to him, and dragged him away from our resting spot.

Fortunately for me, I happened to not be an idiot, and they weren't exactly being quiet, so I was able to hear them quite well.

"What's wrong?" I heard Fireheart ask.

"Well... I kind of want your advice," Cloudpaw responded.

I shifted my position so that I could see them better, and saw Fireheart cock his head to the side. "Oh? What is it?"

"Um... uh, you know the way you and Sandstorm like, love each other?"

My pelt flushed with embarrassment. *Was I really that obvious? And I haven't even been able to tell if Fireheart loves me back!*

I saw Fireheart fluff out, likely in embarrassment not too different from my own. "W-well, I-I wouldn't say *love*..."

My head drooped in sadness. *I guess he doesn't see me like that.*

"Does it look like we love each other?" Fireheart finished.

"Fireheart, you and Sandstorm act like you've been mates since before the clans," Cloudpaw commented wryly. "Why aren't you mates?"

I wish, Cloudpaw. But I'm too nervous and Fireheart is too mouse-brained.

"Well, I guess we're just not at that stage yet." Fireheart looked over and caught my eye. Despite not wanting to seem like I was eavesdropping, I held the eye contact, and smiled. I could see the gears turning in Fireheart's head.

I would love to be mates with you. Just say the word, Fireheart.

"So, uh, can you give me advice anyway," Cloudpaw finally picked up where he left off, "I-I think I like this she-cat." He was basically whispering at this point, so I had to sneakily move a bit closer to hear them.

Fireheart and myself both purred in amusement."Oh really? Do you want to tell me who she is?"

"Uh, she's- um... Brightpaw. I like Brightpaw."

Aww, Cloudpaw has a crush!

Fireheart, practically mirroring my own thoughts, tickled his tail under Cloudpaw's chin and teased, "Aww, wittle Cloudpaw has a crush!"

Cloudpaw growled in annoyance, but continued on nevertheless. "So, can you help me? I want her to like me more. I heard that Sandstorm used to hate you before, now she like, loves you. Brightpaw doesn't hate me but how do I get her to like me."

Wow, I really am that obvious.

"Well, I'm not sure Sandstorm quite *loves* me-"

I do!

"But you can't force a cat to love you. Brightpaw can only like you for you, so don't be upset if she doesn't like you in that way," Fireheart warned the young apprentice.

"Be nice to her. Ask her to do things with you. Ask her to go on walks, or even just something else fun. Offer to help her with tasks. Give her fresh-kill, make her nest nice. Tell her she's beautiful. Well- maybe wait a bit to tell her that.

"All of these things can make a she-cats day. But also, don't push yourself on her too much. Give her space. You can still hang out with her, but don't be obsessive or possessive. If she has other friends, let her be with them as well. Make friends with her friends too, and then you can all get along"

Maybe I could do these things for Fireheart as well...

Cloudpaw's eyes widened as Fireheart continued to ramble on, eventually getting almost as large as his face. "Oh, no, that's a lot!" He drooped a little. "I don't even think she likes me."

Fireheart draped his tail around Cloudpaw's shoulders. "Don't worry, I'm sure she likes you. Just give it time to develop, okay?"

Cloudpaw perked up. "You really think she likes me?"

"Of course she does. Who wouldn't like you?"

I almost choked from trying to hold back my laughter. Fireheart would always come into the warriors den and plop down next to me, and explain which unique way Cloudpaw had managed to piss him off today.

"Thanks Fireheart!"

Fireheart leaned forward and licked Cloudpaw in between his ears. "No problem. Now look! Brightpaw and the others want you to play with them. Off you go!" As Cloudpaw sped off, Fireheart called after him, "Remember what I said!"

At this point I decided that I had rested enough, and moved to sit next to Fireheart as he watched the apprentices play.

As I got closer, I could hear Fireheart purring to himself, and couldn't help but lightly purr. *He's so great with them.*

After I sat down next to him, Fireheart turned and almost collided muzzles with me. He recoiled in surprise when he saw me.

"Oh- um, hi," he mumbled, not meeting my eyes.

"Hey," I responded softly, gazing as best I could into his grassy pools. Fireheart ducked away a little. "Hey, what's wrong?"

Fireheart shook his head quickly, "I-I'm fine." Finally, Fireheart managed to look at me, and we held each other's gaze for quite awhile.

If he hasn't caught on yet, maybe I have to be more intentional.

I eventually turned away to look at the apprentices. "You're really good with the apprentices. Especially Cloudpaw. He's lucky to have someone like you for a mentor."

Fireheart ducked his head again, this time licking his chest in embarrassment. "Uh- thanks. You're pretty good with them too."

Despite knowing he was just polite, I couldn't help but smile a little bit. *Maybe kits wouldn't be such a bad idea with the right cat as a mate.*

"We should start heading back now, the apprentices are getting tired and we've been out for quite awhile," Fireheart said, standing up and motioning towards the apprentices.

I half-nodded, trying to search Fireheart's gaze for anything that gave away what he was thinking, but there was no such luck.

Then Fireheart walked past me, and rubbed his cheek briefly against mine. My heart fluttered at the contact, but I shook it off and followed him towards the apprentices.

"Okay guys, time to head back!" Fireheart called. Looking over the apprentices, I smiled inwardly as I realized that Cloudpaw was sitting next to Brightpaw, their pelts brushing.

Once we rounded everyone up, we padded back tiredly together, remembering to stop at our prey stashes to pick up previously caught pieces.

We mostly walked in silence, sometimes broken by the occasional Cloudpaw complaint, or Fernpaw and Ashpaw squabbling.

When we reached camp, we dumped the prey in the fresh-kill pile, and sent the apprentices back to their nests to take a nap. I saw Fireheart about to the same, but I stopped him.

"Are you sure you're okay?" I asked, concern dancing across my face.

Fireheart nodded wearily. "Just tired."

"Will I tell Bluestar you're taking a nap?" I offered.

Fireheart shook his head. "If she wants me, she can find me," he muttered.

I tentatively reached my tail up and dragged it along his spine. "Well, it's lonely in there. I'll keep you company." It might have been a bit of a reach, but thankfully, Fireheart nodded in agreement.

We both headed into the warriors den, and Fireheart immediately sunk into his nest. I wrapped as best I could around him- Fireheart was a big cat- and pressed my body into his. His pelt was amazingly warm, likely from sitting in the sun most of the day.

Finally, I began to drag my tongue across his back, both cleaning his pelt and lulling him into a sleep. Once I felt his breathing begin to ease, I halted my grooming and laid my head down next to his, trying my best to calm my heart and also fall into slumber.

After this event, I decided that I was okay with having kits, so long as it was with Fireheart. He was so good with the apprentices, and he was so nurturing to Cloudpaw, I was sure he would be great with kits of his own.

Funnily enough, when Firestar and I were reminiscing in Starclan, I also found out that that day was also the day Fireheart decided that he wanted to have kits someday.

I wish that we would have been able to have more kits as well, past just Squirrelflight and Leafpool, but unfortunately Starclan had no such plans for us.

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Word count - 1894

❂----------❂

Author's Note

✧

A little bit of a shorter chapter this time, but OMG I love this chapter.

This is another one taken directly from the works of @lunar-

serenity, so like, 98% of this chapter goes to her. She's such a good writer, I wish she'd come back.

But this is such a good idea for a chapter. Couldn't help but steal it.

Good news! Well, not for me, but for you. Lacrosse season is over! We unfortunately got knocked out of the playoffs, and college ends in two weeks, so I *should* have more time to write. Like always, no promises.

ALSO!

I'm officially completely open for suggestions regarding this book! I only have two or three more ideas for this section, but I want to get to at least six more, so if you have any good ideas, please reach out to me on discord!

Again, DISCORD. I will not consider ideas given in the comments.

✧

- Maple -

- 4 ▫ 27 ▫ 2025 -

✧ S E V E N ✧

✧

S E V E N

❂----------❂

WATCHING FIREHEART pad back into the clearing with his fur matted down confirmed my suspicions that he had been somewhere or doing something he wasn't supposed to. His paws were dusted with pine needles, and he avoided my gaze just a heartbeat too long for comfort.

But there were still a few cats milling around the entrance to the gorse tunnel, so I decided to save him the embarrassment of being questioned in front of everyone. "Been hunting?" I asked casually, twitching an ear as if I hadn't noticed his guilty expression.

"Looking for Greystripe, honestly." His eyes flickered with the gleam of someone who was telling half-truths, and the twitch of his tail gave him away. I would ask him about it later, when no one else was around to overhear.

"So I don't suppose you've seen Cloudpaw at all?" I pressed instead.

Cloudpaw had left camp early in the day, and he hadn't returned since then, even though it was nearly sun-high. The sun-high patrol had mentioned that they would keep an eye out for him, but

information now would be better. The last thing I wanted was Bluestar scolding Fireheart—or me—for letting an apprentice slip too far beyond the camp's watch.

Obviously, I wasn't that worried about Cloudpaw getting hurt. Cloudpaw was quite a large apprentice and could probably hold his own against a small fox. As stubborn as he was, he was Fireheart's apprentice, and a great fighter like him too.

But I was worried about something else.

"He's not in camp?" Fireheart's ears pricked, his voice sharpening.

"He announced that he was going out hunting first thing this morning."

Fireheart's tail lashed once in frustration. He shared my worry without needing to say it: Cloudpaw was probably paying another visit to the Twolegs.

"What should I do?" Fireheart muttered, more to himself than me.

Fireheart had talked to Cloudpaw before about his visits, but it seemed that the white tom hadn't heeded any of Fireheart's warnings. It was eating away at him, I could tell—his shoulders were tense, his claws half-unsheathed as if he wanted to rake the earth.

"Why don't we go find him together?" I suggested gently. "Maybe if we both talk to him, we can make him see some sense."

Fireheart looked at me gratefully, his eyes briefly softening. "It's worth a try," he agreed.

He led the way through Tallpines, neither of us speaking as we ran lightly over the ground. The air was still, heavy with the resinous tang of pine sap, and the needles felt soft and cool beneath our paws. Fireheart seemed oddly familiar with the area, slipping between the trees with practiced ease, although I was wary of every unfamiliar sound. The silence pressed in on me, broken only by the occasional caw of a crow.

As we padded out from the pine forest and into the woods, my shoulders tightened.

"Are you sure this is the way he would have come?" I whispered, looking nervously from side to side. A dog barked suddenly in the distance, sharp and grating, and my fur bristled until every hair stood on end.

"It's okay, the dog won't leave its garden," Fireheart assured me, though his tone carried more reluctance than certainty.

I narrowed my eyes at him. I think Fireheart was wary of explaining that to me, since I had made fun of his kittypet roots before. He was careful with his words now, as though stepping on thorns.

"Don't the Twolegs bring their dogs out here?" I pressed, unwilling to let it go.

"Sometimes," Fireheart admitted with a shrug. "But we'll have plenty of warning. Twoleg dogs don't exactly sneak through the woods. You'll hear them before you smell them, and their stench isn't subtle."

I appreciated his attempt at humor, but I couldn't shake the uneasy feeling clawing at my belly.

"Come on," he urged suddenly. "Cloudpaw's scent is here." He rubbed his cheek against a bramble stem, whiskers quivering. "Does it smell fresh to you?"

I leaned forward and sniffed the bramble, nose twitching. "Yeah, it does." The scent was sharp, recent—he had passed through not long ago.

We picked up our pace toward the Twolegplace, following Cloudpaw's trail until it thickened around a large nest. The scent of Twolegs burned my nose, sour and unnatural.

Fireheart leapt up next to some sort of see-through wall and peered into the Twoleg nest. His ears flattened. "Something's not right," he warned. "The nest is empty. Follow me, but stay low. I'm going to take a closer look."

Just then, the loud rumble of a monster started up, rattling through the ground and making my heart lurch into my throat. Fireheart slipped down the passage that skirted one side of the nest. His fur bristled with fear, but his paws didn't falter until he had reached the end of the pathway. He peered out around the corner of the Twoleg nest, and I followed in a similar manner, my belly brushing the earth.

The roar of the monster drowned everything. My ears rang, my tail lashed in panic.

"Help! Don't let them take me!" I barely caught a yowl over the thunder of the monster's engine.

Cloudpaw!

I felt Fireheart's body bunch up next to me. "No! Wait!"

But it was too late—Fireheart jumped out from our hiding spot and tore after the monster as it pulled away.

He pounded after it with desperate strides, but he stood no chance. The monster only gained distance, wheels spitting dust, until it roared around a corner and was gone.

"Fireheart! Come back!" I called, fear tightening my throat.

He skidded to a stop, his sides heaving, and glanced in despair at the empty Thunderpath where the monster had vanished. Slowly, stiffly, he turned and hurried back to me.

Neither of us spoke as I led him away from the Twolegplace, back past the nest and over the fence that surrounded the garden. My paws felt heavy, each step dragging with dread.

"Fireheart..." I finally ventured when we landed on the forest floor. "Are you okay?"

He didn't respond for a long time. Instead, he stared at the blank fence behind him as though willing Cloudpaw to come running back. He no doubt was thinking about how he had failed to save his only kin, and how he would get him back.

I mean, I was thinking the same thing.

"Your pads are bleeding," I murmured at last.

Fireheart lifted his foreleg and looked at it. Seeing him just stare, I tentatively leaned over and began to clean the wound, thankful that he didn't shy away from the contact.

"He's gone," Fireheart finally rasped.

I stopped my cleaning and stood back up. "He'll find his way home." Fireheart looked deep into my eyes, and it seemed to calm him a little. "If he wants to. Cloudpaw may be happier where he's going. You want him to be happy, don't you?"

Looking back, those may not have been the best words to say—not the ones Fireheart needed to hear. It was like I was telling him we might be better off forgetting about Cloudpaw.

Despite this, he still nodded slowly in response.

"Come on then," I continued briskly. "Let's get back to camp."

"It's easy for you!" he suddenly snapped, voice cracking. "You share Clan blood with the rest of them. Cloudpaw was my only kin. Now there's no one in the Clan that's close to me!"

I flinched as if his words had struck me like claws. "How can you say that? You have me!" I spat. "I've done nothing but try to help you! Doesn't that mean anything? I thought our friendship was important to you, but clearly I was wrong!"

Not wanting to see how my jealousy impacted him, I spun around and raced back toward camp, not caring if he chased after me. Sparse tears flew with the wind as I ran, dampening my fur.

And it's not just me! Greystripe might be in RiverClan right now, but they're still close! And Bluestar surely still cares for him. And Cinderpaw too! Why couldn't Fireheart see that?

✧✧✧

I decided to eat later that day next to Runningwind, who had always been a calm cat. I needed that steadiness while my thoughts whirled like a storm about Fireheart and what he was thinking of right now. How mad he was.

I shared most of the story of the day with Runningwind, leaving out where Fireheart and I really went. That was Fireheart's story to tell.

But eventually, no matter how much I wanted to avoid him, Fireheart came padding over to us with a mouse dangling from his jaws.

I looked away as he approached, entertaining myself by tearing the wings off of my swallow.

"Hi there," Runningwind greeted. "I thought you were going to miss mealtime."

Fireheart dropped his mouse and tried to purr a friendly reply, but his answer came out hoarsely. "Busy day." Runningwind glanced at me, but I still ignored Fireheart. His whiskers twitched in amusement though, and I flicked my tail across his flank in warning.

"Sorry about earlier," Fireheart whispered.

"So you should be," I muttered, not looking up.

"You've been a good friend," Fireheart persisted. "I'm sorry I made you think I don't appreciate you."

"Yeah, well, next time try thinking beyond your own whiskers."

There was a long pause, Fireheart not responding, and myself not caring to say anything else.

Runningwind sat there incredibly awkwardly, caught between us. Finally he excused himself, "I'm gonna go see if the queens need anything."

Fireheart and I both watched him scramble away toward the nursery, clearly desperate to escape the tension.

"Just saying sorry doesn't make me feel any better. I'm still hurt that you wouldn't consider me close to you," I said finally once Runningwind was out of earshot.

"I know," Fireheart admitted, voice low. "But I really do appreciate you, Sandstorm. I was just so caught up in losing Cloudpaw that I wasn't thinking straight. I hope you can eventually forgive me."

"I forgive you now, but I'm still upset."

Hesitantly, Fireheart offered, "We can go hunting later, if that'll make it up to you?"

"It's a start." I meowed curtly.

Another short pause took place, this one more comfortable than the last.

"Are we friends again?" Fireheart meowed.

I looked up at him, feigning confusion. "What are you talking about? We always were," I replied simply.

Fireheart laid down slowly next to me, nervous as if I might spring up and sprint away. Seeing that I didn't, he relaxed and dug into his mouse.

I watched him eat, tail flicking. *Toms are all so confusing. Incredibly short-sighted, yet as apologetic as a squirrel caught stealing nuts.*

Hard not to love.

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Word count - 1763

❂----------❂

Author's Note

✧

Thank you to for giving me the idea for this chapter! I hope you

enjoy how it came out!

If you would like one of your ideas to become a chapter, message me on discord! You can find my username in my bio.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

Anyways I have no new ideas for other chapters so if you have any please let me know! I'll ask some of my friends (one friend) too if they have any, but I'd love to hear from you guys!

No promises on new chapters, but I'll let you know when I get an idea on my message board!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

✧

- Maple -

- 9 ▫ 10 ▫ 2025 -

✧ E I G H T ✧

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V I T R I F I C A T I O N

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E I G H T

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BLUESTAR'S DECLINE into mental instability was hard for us all, for sure, but watching Fireheart try to deal with her breakdowns while also trying to do his duties made me feel like I had it easy. He had to take on most of Bluestar's duties as well, because she was so unstable.

Even worse, a lot of the clan's view on him was negative based on a few events that happened recently.

Firestar was always incredibly compassionate, through all his moons, but sometimes that compassion got him into more trouble than he bargained for.

"I just don't know what they want", he complained to me one day as we shared a squirrel. "I'm trying to do the best I can, but it seems like no matter which decision I make, what side I align myself too, they don't approve."

It hurt me to see him so anxious all the time, always having to deal with a new complaint and therefore never having time for anything

else. It was rare that we were even able to have these moments, where we were able to lay down, share a meal, and chat.

"Bluestar made you deputy for a reason; she trusts your judgment. While she may not be in the best state of mind right now, the real Bluestar would trust you to make the best decision."

"Sure, but what about everyone else?"

"What about them?"

"What if they don't trust my judgment? A few of the older warriors give me weird looks every time I'm making an announcement, and some of the younger cats may be more inclined to trust them."

I took the time to finish chewing to think about my response. "I don't necessarily think that they don't trust your judgement."

Fireheart cocked his head to one side, confused. "What do you mean?"

"This is a hard time for all of us. Swiftpaw and Brightpaw, Tigerclaw leaving us, Bluestar's madness. In some capacity, we're all scared. I don't think that they don't trust your judgement, I think that they're just scared that you're going to do something rash, or ignore what they have to say."

Fireheart looked towards the ground, pondering over what I had just said.

The cooling air of leaf-fall pushed against me, and I instinctively stood up and shook my fur out to try to warm myself.

"So what do I do?" He finally asked.

"You make sure they know you're listening to them. Hear what they have to say. Ask them for advice before making big decisions. And it's not like you have to ask everyone. Ask the senior warriors, the queens, the elders. There may even be times where you could ask the apprentices what to do. Call it 'mental training'."

Fireheart snorted in response. "Like I'd trust Cloudpaw to make a

good decision."

I smiled hearing him laugh for the first time today, finally breaking him out of his slump. "You don't have to actually take his advice. Just let him know that you value what he has to say as his deputy and that you consider his ideas."

Another gust of cool-air breathed its way through the camp, it's low growl the only sound for a moment. I shivered at the feeling, and laid back down on the ground, this time closer to Fireheart to try to warm up. He shifted towards me as well to try to share his body heat.

"And do the same with everyone else, too. Show them that you don't play favorites. Even if you don't take as much advice from some cats."

"Like Cloudpaw."

"Like Cloudpaw", I repeated.

Fireheart thought for a moment before finally mustering up something to say. "Thank you for this, Sandstorm. You're a great help."

My grin stretched as wide as the gorge. "What would you do without me?"

"I guess we'll never know."

Fireheart turned to look at me, and we locked eyes for awhile, staring into each other's eyes.

I'm always here to support you.

This time, unlike others, we didn't snap away from the eye contact like we usually do. Instead, we held the eye contact, *comfortably*, for quite sometime, small smiles dancing across both of our faces. This was the first time I really got to look deep into Fireheart's eyes, and actually appreciate the gleam that flickered off of them.

"That's enough, lovebirds", a voice came from in front of us.

We both turned and saw Whitestorm waiting there, hopefully not for too long.

"Sorry to interrupt, but I'd like to share details about the midday patrol, if you don't mind, Sandstorm."

"No, of course not." I quickly stood and shook myself out, lightly sweeping my tail across Fireheart's back as I did so.

"Thank you", Whitestorm said, giving me a small wink as I passed by him. I rolled my eyes in response, although he couldn't tell as I was already past his flank.

Fireheart must have taken that advice to heart, because for the rest of his leadership, there was always some new idea someone gave him that he wanted to get my opinion on. I caught him multiple times surrounded by groups of cats, discussing new patrol requirements or sharing ideas to nurture the apprentices better.

He even kept at it in Starclan when he led patrols around the hunting grounds, especially when the patrol went near the Dark Forest.

That was one of his best qualities: he actually *listened* to what cats said, not just heard the words that came out of their mouths. And he usually applied what he learned too. I think that's a really big part of what made him one of the greatest leaders Thunderclan has ever seen.

✧✧✧

A few moons later, I was chowing down on a piece of fresh-kill, watching as the camp tried to recover from the recent deaths in the camp.

Despite how close Fireheart and I got, talking about his worries that he wasn't, I was quite mad at him. Very recently, the apprentice ceremonies of both of Tigerstar's children, Tawnypaw and Bramblepaw. I was sure that I would be one of their mentors, especially Tawnypaw's. Fireheart had all but assured me that I would be appointed.

But last week, I overheard Fireheart talking with Bluestar in the leader's den about appointing *Brackenfur* as Tawnypaw's mentor, which is what ended up happening.

That, plus the barely prevented attack on Windclan, and the dogs attacking cats both in the forest and close to camp. It wasn't a good moon for the clan.

Fireheart emerged from the warrior's den - likely conversing with other warriors - and paused. He caught my eye, no matter how fast I tried to look away. He began to pad over to me.

"What," I said bitterly as he approached. I was being overdramatic, sure, but I still hadn't completely forgiven him.

"Just wanted to come and see how you were doing. It's been a rough few days for the whole clan."

"It has."

Fireheart stood there awkwardly, like he wanted to ask something but also didn't want to test my nerves.

I rolled my eyes, and scooted over to make room for him on the small nettle patch I was lying on.

Fireheart happily plopped down next to me and draped his tail over mine. I didn't move it.

"So what is this really about?"

Fireheart took a deep breath, and spoke. "Longtail discovered rabbit meat along with tufts of cat fur at Snakerocks. We're forming a plan to get rid of the dogs, before Tigerstar or the dogs can cause anymore harm."

"Okay..."

"I want you to come with us. You're fast and brave, and the clan needs you."

I turned my gaze on him, unreadable.

"*I* need you," he blurted out, as if he was afraid I was about to say no. "For Bluestar's sake, as well as the clan's. I know things haven't been right between us since I stopped the battle with Windclan, and gave Tawnypaw to Brackenfur. But I trust you. Whatever you think about me, do it for the Clan."

I nodded slowly. I was thoughtful, weighing the risks of this mission. It was incredibly dangerous, sure, but leaving the dogs to roam could be more dangerous. "I know why you didn't want to fight Windclan, " I began. "In a way, I thought you were right.. But it was hard to know you had gone behind Bluestar's back without telling the rest of us."

"I know, but-"

"But you're the deputy," I interrupted, reaching one paw towards Fireheart for silence. "You have responsibilities the rest of us can't understand. And I can see how torn you must have felt - between loyalty to Bluestar and loyalty to the clan." Hesitating, and staring down at my paws, I added, "I was torn too. I wanted to be loyal to the warrior code, and I wanted to be loyal to you Fireheart."

Fireheart didn't respond for a moment.

Fox-dung, I screwed this whole thing up!

Eventually, he stretched out his head and pressed it against my flank, and I breathed a great sigh of relief. I looked up at him again, catching his grassy eyes, staring deep into their depths.

"I'm sorry, Sandstorm," Fireheart murmured. "I never meant to hurt you."

His next words were so incredibly soft and hard to hear, I had to lean in to hear them.

Please...

"I love you, Sandstorm."

My heart swelled with the greatest happiness I had ever felt. Greater than when I first walked around the camp. Greater than when I became an apprentice, or even a warrior. Greater than when Fireheart first took my advice.

My eyes glowed, and I let out a purr and touched my nose to his. "I love you too, Fireheart, I always have," I whispered, only to him. "That's why it hurt so much when you asked Bluestar if Brackenfur could mentor Tawnypaw. I thought you didn't respect me."

"I made a mistake." Fireheart's voice shook. "I don't know how I could have been so mouse-brained.

"I want you beside me, always."

Yes!

I happily held the following silence, breathing in his scent and rejoicing in the warmth of his body. I felt as though I would always be happy if I could stay like that forever.

But Fireheart pulled away. "Sandstorm," he told me, lifting his head. "I know what we're going to face out there. It's more dangerous than I ever imagined. I'm not ordering you to come, but I still want you with me."

Always. Always! ALWAYS!

My purr grew deeper, a vibration that filled my whole body. "Of course I'm coming with you, you stupid furball."

Fireheart blinked at my insult and let out a quiet laugh, the sound

low in his chest.

"Good," he murmured. "We leave at moonhigh."

Moonhigh.

The word sat heavy between us. This wouldn't be a normal patrol. Every cat in the Clan knew it. The dogs had already killed once. If Fireheart's plan failed, they could kill again.

Fireheart rose to his paws and brushed his flank against mine before stepping away. "Try to rest," he said softly.

As if I could.

I watched him cross the clearing toward Whitestorm, Brackenfur, and the others he had chosen. Longtail stood nearby, his tail flicking thoughtfully, while two nervous apprentices hovered just behind him.

Fernpaw and Ashpaw.

They tried to look brave, but their pelts were fluffed and their ears twitched at every sound.

Good. They should be nervous. This was no ordinary task for apprentices.

Still, Fireheart had chosen them carefully. They were quick, agile, and good climbers. If the plan worked the way he hoped, speed and trees would be the only things keeping us alive.

I finished my fresh-kill without tasting it. The camp felt tight with fear. Queens watched the clearing with anxious eyes, while the elders whispered quietly among themselves.

At the entrance to her den sat Bluestar.

She looked thin beneath her blue-gray pelt, her once-sharp gaze clouded with something distant and troubled. She didn't say a word as Fireheart explained the patrol.

But she was watching.

Eventually the moon climbed high above the trees.

Fireheart's voice rang quietly through the camp.

"Patrol. Time to go."

I was already on my paws.

The chosen cats gathered quickly: Whitestorm, Brackenfur, Longtail, Fernpaw, Ashpaw... and me.

Fireheart stood at the front.

His green eyes swept over us, steady despite the danger ahead.

"We're going to lure the dogs away from the forest," he began quietly. "We'll run in turns. Each cat will lead the dogs for a stretch, then escape up a tree. The next cat will take over and keep them moving toward the gorge."

Fernpaw swallowed hard.

Ashpaw's tail lashed once, but he nodded.

Fireheart met each of our eyes in turn.

"Stay calm. Stay fast. And climb high."

Whitestorm dipped his head. "We're with you."

Fireheart nodded.

"Let's move."

We slipped silently out of the camp.

The forest was cold beneath the moonlight, frost crunching softly under our paws as we ran. The scent of dog grew stronger the closer we came to Snakerocks.

By the time we reached the rocks, the smell was thick enough to

sting my nose.

Fireheart crouched low and peered down.

Below us, the dogs prowled through the clearing. Muscle rippling beneath their mangy pelts, their jaws snapping as they fought over scraps.

My fur prickled along my spine.

Fireheart turned to us.

"This is it," he whispered.

No one spoke.

He glanced at Brackenfur.

The tan cat nodded. Then he took a breath and sprang down the slope.

The dogs noticed immediately.

A sharp bark split the air as their heads snapped up.

Then they were charging.

Brackenfur streaked through the clearing like a bolt of flame, the dogs thundering after him.

We scattered into position.

He ran until the dogs were fully focused on him.

Then Whitestorm burst from the trees ahead, yowling loudly.

The dogs changed direction instantly.

Brackenfur leaped into the branches of a nearby oak just as they rushed beneath him, snapping and barking in frustration.

Whitestorm led them deeper into the forest.

A heartbeat later, Longtail took over.

Each cat ran hard, drawing the dogs farther and farther from ThunderClan territory before scrambling up a tree at the last moment.

It worked.

But the dogs were fast.

Faster than I liked.

Soon only three of us remained on the ground.

Fernpaw darted forward next.

For a young apprentice, she ran beautifully—long strides carrying her swiftly across the forest floor. The dogs surged after her in a furious pack.

My claws flexed nervously against the bark of the tree I waited in.

Just a little farther...

Fernpaw reached a tall pine and scrambled up the trunk as the dogs lunged beneath her.

Their furious barking echoed through the forest.

Ashpaw leaped down next.

He ran hard toward the gorge, the dogs racing after him with snapping jaws.

My heart pounded.

The gorge wasn't far now.

Ashpaw veered sharply toward a leaning oak and sprang up the trunk just as the dogs reached him.

Their momentum carried them straight past.

That left two cats.

Me.

And Fireheart.

I leaped down from the tree and tore across the forest.

The wind lashed through my fur as the dogs spotted me and gave chase.

Their paws thundered behind me.

Closer.

Closer.

The gorge loomed ahead, its dark chasm cutting through the earth.

Just a little farther.

At the last moment I darted toward a tree and hauled myself up the trunk, claws digging deep into the bark.

The dogs skidded below me, barking furiously.

Then Fireheart dropped from the rocks nearby.

The dogs saw him instantly.

Their attention shifted like lightning.

They charged after him.

Fireheart ran straight toward the gorge.

My heart lurched. He was cutting it far too close.

"Fireheart!" I yowled.

He raced along the very edge of the gorge, loose stones scattering beneath his paws as the dogs lunged after him.

One misstep—

Suddenly a blue-grey shape burst from the bushes. It slammed into Fireheart, knocking him sideways away from the edge.

"Bluestar!" he gasped. But she didn't stop.

The leader wheeled around and ran straight toward the dogs, her eyes blazing with the fierce strength I remembered from seasons ago.

The dogs changed course instantly.

Now they were chasing her.

"Bluestar, no!" Fireheart cried.

She ran along the crumbling edge of the gorge, the dogs pounding after her.

For a moment she looked back.

And in that instant, I saw it.

Clarity.

The old strength shining in her eyes once more.

Then the ground beneath her paws gave way.

Bluestar and the dogs plunged over the edge together.

For a heartbeat, everything was silent.

Then Fireheart moved.

"Bluestar!" he yowled.

Before any of us could stop him, he raced along the gorge's edge, searching desperately for a path down. Loose stones clattered beneath his paws as he slid down the steep bank toward the river below.

"Fireheart!" Whitestorm called after him. "Be careful!"

But Fireheart wasn't listening.

I followed as far as I could without losing my footing. The air grew colder the closer we got to the water, the roar of the river growing louder with every step.

When we reached the bottom, Fireheart was already at the edge of the river, staring wildly into the rushing water.

"Bluestar!" he shouted again.

For a moment there was nothing.

Then a gray shape bobbed in the current. Without hesitation he plunged into the rushing river.

The current seized him immediately, tugging at his legs and dragging his fur downstream. He fought against it, claws scraping uselessly against the slippery stones beneath the water.

"Bluestar!" he gasped, paddling harder.

The river spun Bluestar's limp body in the current. Her blue-gray fur was soaked dark, her head barely above the water.

Fireheart lunged forward and grabbed the loose skin at the back of her neck.

The weight nearly pulled him under.

The current was too strong.

His paws slipped against the stones as he struggled to drag her toward the bank.

"Come on... Bluestar..." he panted through clenched teeth.

But the river kept pulling them both downstream.

I raced along the shore helplessly, my heart hammering.

"Fireheart!" I called. "Hold on!"

He tried to haul her closer to the bank, but every step he gained the river stole back.

For the first time, I saw real panic flash across his face.

Then two shapes burst through the reeds on the opposite bank.

Gray pelts.

RiverClan cats.

Mistyfoot and Stonefur.

Their eyes widened. Without hesitation, both cats leaped into the river.

The current tugged at them just as fiercely, but RiverClan cats were born swimmers. Their paws churned through the water with powerful strokes as they fought their way toward Fireheart.

Stonefur reached Fireheart first.

Together they grabbed Bluestar, one on each side, while Mistyfoot pushed from behind.

"Toward the bank!" she ordered.

Slowly—painfully slowly—they forced their way through the rushing water.

At last their paws struck solid ground.

The three cats dragged Bluestar onto the far shore and collapsed beside her, soaked and gasping for breath.

For a moment no one spoke.

Fireheart bent over Bluestar, his sides heaving.

"Bluestar?" he whispered.

Her eyes fluttered faintly.

She was alive.

But only just.

Stonefur stood over her, water dripping from his thick gray pelt. His eyes were filled with fear.

"What happened?" he demanded hoarsely.

Fireheart lifted his head slowly.

"The dogs," he said quietly. "She... she led them over the gorge."

Mistyfoot's ears flattened.

Stonefur stared down at Bluestar, his expression torn between grief and disbelief.

Fireheart gently nudged Bluestar's shoulder.

"Bluestar," he murmured. "Can you hear me?"

Her blue eyes flickered open.

For the first time in many moons... they were clear.

I didn't hear much of what they were saying, as I was on the far bank and they were talking in hushed tones.

But what I did see was Bluestar weakly press her muzzle to Fireheart's head, and then saw her head fall back to the stony floor, eyes shut.

Fireheart leaned his head back and wailed.

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Eventually, Mistyfoot and Stonefur guided a heavy-stepped Fireheart back across the river. The other cats who had participated were still at the top of the gorge, so it was just me waiting.

"Thank you," I told the Riverclan cats.

They nodded. "Good luck," Mistyfoot muttered. "Riverclan will be willing to support you, should you need it."

I repeated myself. "Thank you." They made their way back across the river, pelt to pelt.

Fireheart stared at the ground for a long time before speaking. "Bluestar is gone..." Then he looked at me, panic flickering in his eyes. "Now what? What am I supposed to do?"

I close my eyes breifly, saying a quick prayer to Starclan for the late leader. Then I looked at Fireheart. "You travel to the Moonstone first thing tomorrow. You lead," I pause for a moment. "We thrive."

"But- But I'm not ready!"

"You'll never truly be 'ready'," I wrapped my tail around Fireheart as I began guiding him back to the top of the gorge. "You'll have other cats to help you. Whitestorm, Cinderpelt, Greystripe, Dustpelt. Me."

Fireheart intertwined his tail with mine, and took a deep breath. "What do I tell them? What do I tell the *clan*?"

I spoke simply. "The truth. That the dogs are gone. That their leader made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure the safety of the clan."

Fireheart didn't speak for awhile. "Alright."

We crested the gorge, the other cats waiting for us.

And Fireheart spoke.

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Word count - 3402

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Author's Note

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Alrighty alrighty alrighty.

So. It's been a bit. 6 months?

I figured that I should grind out the last 1000 words in celebration of this book's 2nd anniversary! So here we are! One of the longest chapters with the confession! Yay!

That part aside, I appreciate all of you sticking with me while I am so gosh darn inconsistent. A LOT of stuff going in in Maple's life right now.

I'm kind of giving in! If you have an idea for a chapter of this book, please leave a quick little summary of your idea in the comments of this chapter, along with a way that I can reach out to you privately (email, discord, IG, whatever). If I like your idea, I'll reach out!

That being said, I am almost completely out of ideas for this section of the book, I only have one or two more that will come up later. I need some fillers!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

Okay I'm only gonna be able to start working on the next chapter when someone gives me an idea or I suddenly come up with one on my own.

✧

- Maple -

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